

Retired National Athletes: A Qualitative Case Study about the Role of the Family During the Athlete Retirement

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Abstract: This research was related to the experience of family and the closest people of athletes who retired from professional sport. The objective of this research is to have a deep understanding the experience of family and the closest people or friends in managing and interpreting their roles over when the athletes were in retirement period from professional sport. The research method used was depth interview. The subjects were the athletes' family and closest people. Data analysis used was interpretative phenomenology analysis. The results of this research were: (1) there were good relationship between the athlete and their closest people; (2) family support worked positively against the retired athletes, (3) the changes in the behavior and attitude of the athletes were not known by the families and the closest people. Based on the result of research, it can be summed up that family and closest people would strengthen the positive behavior of the retired athletes.

1 INTRODUCTION

Changes that occur in the life of an athlete related to psychology, social and vocational are part of the transition to sports or they are known as retirement from sports (Cecić Erpič, Wylleman, & Zupančič, 2004). When athletes retire, there are changes that will be experienced. These changes occur in various aspects such as in emotional feeling. During the retirement, the athletes even feel loss of identity in their social life (Brown, Webb, Robinson, & Cotgreave, 2018; Park, Lavalley, & Tod, 2013). This change will be seen during the adjustment process, starting with the decision to retire for the next few years (Fernandez, Stephan, & Fouquereau, 2006; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). In some cases, long-term mental health is a problem that is often faced when they have difficulty adjusting (Cosh, Crabb, & Tully, 2015; McKenna & Thomas, 2007).

From some reports, the athlete after retirement will experience amusement, depression and drug abuse (Gouttebarga, Aoki, & Kerkhoffs, 2015; Lavalley & Robinson, 2007). The process described by athletes during retirement from sports has many influential factors, such as self-adjustment, strong reasons for retirement, planning before retirement, and the level of social support for sports (mis., Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

1.1 Relationships and Life Shifts

Transition is a complex interpersonal phenomenon, so that the transition or retirement can be seduced, influenced and resolved through the relationship between people and others through sharing (de Jong Gierveld & Dykstra, 1993). For a long time, social relationships and support have been considered as important factors during retirement (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). One of the examples is the research that discusses retirement from an employee who found that people having high quality relationships were more satisfied with retirement decisions and feelings of self-adjustment would be more easily felt during the changes in retirement when deciding to leave the job. (Sherry, Tomlinson, Loe, Johnston, & Feeney, 2017). Several studies also showed a disorder related to students who did not get support from some family members that had a very negative impact on him when trying to adjust during the transition to university (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007). Other findings emphasize that positive and negative life experiences will often occur in the context of interpersonal contractions in close relationships (Carstensen, Fung, & Charles, 2003).

On life theory and theories about the family

system, Elder (1998) and Broderick (1993) explain that someone's life intrinsically will be related to other people. In relationships, it will not be separated from space and time. Even better, based on personal processes, it will shape experiences through dynamic and complex thinking (de Jong Gierveld & Dykstra, 1993). Through previous research regarding the transition of life, it is explained that the transition period is a shared experience. The study shows that the transition of one individual can be very influential on the lives of others (Holdsworth, 2004). It may not only have an impact on those who are nearby, but also have an impact on those who already have a close social relationship (for example, Doiron & Mendolia, 2012). Transition phenomena can occur in a variety of relationships, and will involve family and the closest people (Cowan & Hetherington, 1991).

Transitions that have characteristics are often related to how to negotiate their personal and social identities, as well as in their definition of the role and management of the provision and acceptance of social support (de Jong Gierveld & Dykstra, 1993). Suggestions show that some of these factors will play a very important role in adjustments during the transition by involving a personal and relational welfare they are involved (Schulenberg; Schoon, 2012). For example, a very bad interpersonal communication during the transition period will cause damage to relationships and cause both of them suffering (Solomon, Weber, & Steuber, 2010).

Regarding many studies related to aspects of the transition of life, it was a bit surprising that very little special attention given to the transition to sports. This was a significant gap of knowledge and research that addresses the interpersonal nature of a close relationship is very helpful and will better understand the transition process in sports.

1.2 Interpersonal Aspects of Transition

Interpersonal transition aspects have been discussed through previous research which focused on how athletes assess the availability and quality in social support (more clearly see Park et al., 2013, for reviews). Families and close relatives are a source of support needed by athletes in general. The athletes who get support from family and close relatives will find it easier to adjust to the changes experienced during the transition period (Gilmore, 2008; Park et al., 2013). It is just that the support given by family and close relatives can vary based on quality and sometimes the support provided is not fully accepted because they feel they do not need it (Fortunato &

Marchant, 1999; Lagimodiere & Strachan, 2015). Some prove that the changes felt during the transition will result in their difficult close relationships (Cecić Erpič et al., 2004). For example, for athletes who reveal that there is a tension or conflict that occurs in their relationship due to their thoughts about what is experienced, they may not necessarily understand (Brown et al., 2018).

There is revealing evidence that families and close relatives play very important role during the transition process (Brown et al., 2018). It is just that little research explaining the role of family and close friends in the process of giving support and influencing experience during a broader transition. Studies outside the field of sport show the way people often deal with several challenges when they get social support, including the anxiety feeling that leads to the less appropriate or even less effective role and support (Goldsmith, 1992). The giver of support will also feel deterioration in welfare due to a difficult burden borne (Coyne, Ellard, & Smith, 1990). This can be a detrimental factor for families and relatives in providing appropriate support to athletes during retirement and is a rational challenge and has a negative impact on both parties. Basically, the athletes express how conflict and tension occur in their relationships due to the perspective of athletes who feel that family and relatives do not fully understand the problems they are experiencing (Fortunato & Marchant, 1999). However, to find out the approach taken in understanding the athletes who are experiencing a transition from professional sports, only one example can be found in the research of Lally and Kerr (2008) involving parents of former elite gymnasts. From the research, Lally and Kerr suggest that parents will experience significant disruption to their lives when their children retire. The disorder experienced is seen from the changes that occur in the relationship of parents with their children and also in other parents. Furthermore, from the same view, it has been described how they have lost their goals while the roles and responsibilities of the family have also developed. Lally and Kerr's research shows how important it is to understand the feeling of the athletes who will retire related to the family and close relatives. Thus, the information is very important as preparation for the challenges faced by athletes during retirement.

Although the research conducted by Lally and Kerr (2008) is greatly contributed to providing an understanding of the transitional aspects, the explanation given focus on the athletes' parents. In other studies, it was shown that not only parents but

other families or close relatives, especially in relatives or close friends, sometimes have a significant role during retirement (Brown et al., 2018; Chow, 2001). Although the relationship between parents and close relatives with athletes is fundamentally different, exploring further about the relationship in a case study will provide an opportunity to understand the relational aspects of the transition in identifying similarities or differences that occur in the family and close relatives and a more holistic understanding of phenomena (Noohi, Peyrovi, Goghary, & Kazemi, 2016). The study conducted by Lally and Kerr (2008) focuses on how parents respond to the decision of their daughters' resign and it is very meaningful to explore interpersonal involvement in transition. The approach in this case will probably have potential in interpretive phenomenological approaches (e.g., Smith, 1996). Intersubjective phenomenological concepts can help understanding the shared experiences which are characterized by the creation of interactive meanings that have been created together. Another thing that focuses on phenomenology is the institutions and identities that can broaden the understanding of the personal meaning they have during the transition to family and closest people/ close relatives and they provide a very important place in terms of these phenomena. Hence, we deserve to learn more about their rights.

1.3 Current Research

This study aims to explore how experiences experienced by families of athletes who are experiencing a transition from professional sports. The approach used specifically was the interactive phenomenology approach to explore the interpersonal nature of the transition experienced, in which the transition period affects the closeness of their relationship. Another purpose of this research is to understand more deeply how family can manage and interpret their important roles during the transition period, including their role as supporters. (C. J. Brown et al. *Sports Psychology & Exercise* 40, 2019: 51-60).

2 METHOD

The methodology and philosophical basis of this research were designed and implemented based on the theoretical principles of interactive phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith, 1996) and philosophical assumptions of critical realism.

Wiltshire (2018) argues that crisis realism is a way to overcome persistent paradigmatic debates that limit the impact of research in the field of sports and psychological sports by linking the gap between realist and constructive-interpretivist approaches. Critical realism views the reality as an independent subjective perception of the world (Bhaskar, 1989). In reality, it depends on the sensory perception and interpretation of reality in a different way (Parker, 1992). This is congruent to the interpretive aspects of the phenomenological philosophy which recognizes that the social world existed before the people were thrown in (Heidegger, 1962/1927). However, it also accepts that the world perspective is mediated through individual awareness, as well as their interpretations of their experiences (Finlay, 2009; Heidegger, 1992). Based on that, this research was conducted from ontological perspectives that recognized that the real world already existed but still recognized that it would not be possible to describe objective reality (Danermark, Ekstrom, & Jacobsen, 2005; Finlay, 2009; Heidegger, 1992). Therefore, on the contrary, its aim is to explore and understand the nature of participants' experiences and how they can understand these experiences when involved in their own social world (Smith, 1996; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In the end, this research was a perspective which was congruent with epistemological relativism (Willig, 2016).

Basically, science is a hermeneutic (interpretative) phenomenology and considers language to be important to describe, in understanding the meaning of experience. Experience means that it involves a double period of hermeneutics when researchers try to find out the efforts of participants to understand their own world (Smith et al., 2009). This was why the researchers interpreted the participants' experience. Science was considered very suitable to be used to investigate the experiences of parents and partners from the transition out of sports. It is because it refers to a phenomenological philosophy that seeks to explore the intersubjective nature of the world as an experience that will develop from time to time (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, the IPA could be used to explore the nature of social relations between individuals during the intermediate stage.

2.1 Participants

The sample was chosen using purposive sampling in which the samples were family and the closest people from three professional former athletes, both at regional and national levels. Usually in the IPA

study, the use of a sample was in the form of a homogeneous sample, except that in this case the nature of homogeneity was slightly different depending on the research and its focus. In selecting the samples, the participants could give a particular view of certain interesting phenomena (Smith et al., 2009). In the research carried out, the selected participants would be invited if they meet the requirements such as having experienced or having rank as a former professional athlete and having transition period. It should be remembered that the lack of previous research, the nature of the exploration of the presentation of research, and the practical problem of gaining access to participants having the criteria are the restrictions in the research. One long-term partner such as the husband of a former athlete who had entered the age of 27 years and two of them consisted of family and people closest to the athlete themselves (one male and one female) who were in 20-30 years volunteering to participate in the research. All participants were from Indonesia who lived with the athletes from their career until entering the retirement period. Overall athletes were former athletes who participated in various competitions both at regional and national level for 5 to 15 years and participated in various championships such as Porprov, Kejurda, Kejurnas, and PON. When the families and the closest friends were interviewed, these former athletes had retired in 3-15 years of their career.

2.2 Procedure

After obtaining approval from the institutional sector, the researcher contacted the former athletes through social media or the existing contacts. The researcher then explained the purpose of the study, asked the former athlete to take part in the study and asked permission to contact the family members who were willing to participate in the study.

The participants had the chance to choose the people who were near them and those who had an important role during the athlete's transition period. The decision to allow the athletes to choose the suggested people to participate was intentional. This was because the athletes were free to choose who had an important relationship with the athlete. This strategy was a strategy of personality and social psychology (see Snyder & Ickes, 1985). The suggestion of this strategy was that the research related to phenomena or social processes must first study people who were very likely to manifest or offer insight into phenomena of interest. This statement will produce knowledge about phenomena

or processes because naturally it will be more effectively and efficiently. This was our reasoning that interpersonal processes related to identity, communication, and social support - which was identified as important during the transition (de Jong Gierveld & Dykstra, 1993) - would stand out in close relationships that were nominated by the athlete itself, compared to our choice. The former athletes then invited their closest friends to join in this research. In this case, some of the parents and the partners refused to participate. The reason was because the ex-athletes and/or the parents and the partners wanted to live as they were now. They did not want to repeat the difficult times in their lives. Then, it would make them feel depressed. Three of the former athletes participated in the research reported in other publications (see Brown et al., 2018).

The parents or the partners agreed to participate would be interviewed. Face-to-face interviews were conducted directly because IPA was more suitable for methods that gave participants the opportunity to choose the first person to know deeply their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Generally, the discussion conducted by the author used a semi-structured interview schedule. The guidelines for conducting interviews from phenomenological perspectives (eg, Bevan, 2014; Smith et al., 2009) were chosen to be able to develop questions in exploring context, structure, and meaning of participants' experiences. For example, the participants were asked like: "Can you tell me about sports careers (athlete's name)?", "Can you tell me about how the situation when (athlete's name) retired?", and "Can you tell me about how it feels when (athlete's name) retired?". Although there were interviews, but it could be done openly and flexibly. The participants were required to lead interviews by discussing experiences and problems they experienced together. The time taken in interviews was between 90 to 120 minutes and the interviews would be transcribed verbatim. The participants and the athletes would be given a pseudonym in order to keep their privacy a secret.

2.3 Data Analysis

Every transcript from the information through interactive phenomenological philosophy was the concepts related to agency, identity, intersubjectivity, and the processual nature of experience (Ashworth, 2003; Smith et al., 2009). This concept was the final stage that was more visible from the psychology of sports and exercise

C.J. Brown et al (2019). The research involved the researchers in reflection dialogues between psychological knowledge and data in order to produce the most important interpretive analysis for IPA (Smith et al., 2009). Transcript analysis was carried out through the guidelines described by Smith et al. (2009).

A special component of science was to commit idiographic questions; therefore, the analysis could be carried out in each different case before conducting a cross-case analysis. At the initial stage, the analysis involved the reader in several transcripts before a detailed set of notes and comments in order to capture the important components of the account. The notes focused on describing participants' experience content, frequently used languages and conceptual interpretations that aimed to provide a deep perspective on things that were meaningful and inherent to the experiences someone had gone through. The note was used as a form of developing a theme and it had a function to shorten data and capture the structure of participant identity.

Then, in the process of extracting and summarizing the theme, it might be possible to group them together to form a superordinate theme that would represent the same meaning or the central concept/ cross-case analysis in identifying a pattern, similarity and difference between superordinate themes and the themes. Therefore, the participants were used to develop high-level concepts. This aimed to provide a coherent data account, while still retaining the ideological focus which was the core of the IPA. Writing final analysis had an equally important role in the analytical process. This was due to its deep involvement in the participant's account and allowed further interpretation of the data. Thinking about the philosophy of science, the account shared between the researchers and the participants and also the final report representing the interpretation of the researcher about experience was during the participant's transition (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, this was considered tentative, not a true account of experiences in the transition period of parents and partners.

3 RESULTS

In this study, the main focus was on the experience of the family and the people closest to an athlete experiencing retirement. Before entering the main topic, the author wanted to give a little description of the athlete experiences after deciding to retire. There were indeed many responses about the decisions

chosen, including some of the changes experienced such as losing self-confidence, identity, the difficulty of building a new career and changes in traits that might affect the relationship between family and those around them. From some of these explanations, there were actually some previous studies which discussed the experience of athlete transitions (e.g., Brown et al., 2018; Park et al., 2013) and this underlay the author's focus on the family and the closest friends of the athlete during retirement.

3.1 Outline

As long as the athletes were still in the field of sports, the family and close relatives of the athletes was very supportive. However, if it goes further some of them just know and do not further know how the athlete develops. In this case, they continued to support their activities. This was because some families did not feel too close due to the exercise that was too often done by the athlete. They could meet and communicate only a few times. At this time, they would feel close even if it only lasted briefly, but they could know at a glance what things experienced by these athletes.

The interpretation was carried out to find out the views of the family and the closest people using the overall theme by labeling "experience of parallel transition and sharing". The theme provided two specific contexts and formed a structure of analysis such as: experience when retiring for the first time, and experience when supporting.

3.2 Experience when Retiring for the First Time

This theme was based on how the family and the closest people reacted and how the retirement response of athletes and during retirement could affect their own relationships.

3.2.1 Reaction of Family and Closest People

When being interviewed, the three people from the family and the closest person of the athlete explained that when the athlete decided to retire, the first thing that came to their mind was that they would always fully support the decisions chosen by the athlete. As stated by Slamet (a close relative of Nuzul Hoky athlete) regarding the decision of Nuzul who wanted to retire because he wanted to focus on continuing education and looking for a permanent job that was more guaranteed and did not forget to

get married. Slamet revealed that he would always support any Nuzull's decision as long as what he decided was the best for him. The same thing was also conveyed by Fero who was a close friend of a karate athlete from Kalimantan. Fero said that he would always support whatever decision from Jannet. Although the decision was very unfortunate for the family, especially for the coaches and the colleagues as stated by Nuzul, but they continued to support the decisions that had been chosen.

3.2.2 The Perceived Impact on Yourself

As long as the athlete had a career in the world of professional sports, the family and the closest people were often directly involved or watched the competition through the athlete. As stated by Fero, for Janet, participating in competitions, not infrequently Fero is always with him. Frequently, Janet told about how she felt during a match and asked for her response. Thus, when the athletes were in their retirement years, they experienced changes in which they would no longer feel the atmosphere. On the other hand, the relatives of Nuzul revealed that they only accompanied him while competing so that there was no significant change experienced. However, Slamet continued to support by giving motivation when Nuzul would compete.

3.3 Experience When Supporting

During the interviewing process, there were several important points delivered by family and close relatives. They revealed that the support provided was not only in communicating, but also many things that were very necessary in supporting the athletes especially during the first time the athlete entered retirement where changes occurred in the athlete's environment. Support in the form of an emotional approach was one of the most common types of support given by family and closest relatives.

When entering the early stages of retirement, of course many changes that occur starting from strange feelings caused by drastic changes in daily life, anxiety and fear. When this kind of family and close relatives strived to help with moral encouragement such as motivating and giving advice, the athletes were not alone in facing the problems. As stated by Slamet, he (Slamet) always provided the best motivation and advice needed so that the anxiety experienced by Nuzul could be reduced and could live the life during the transition to retirement.

The same thing was conveyed by Fero who told me that Janet often told him about how he felt. At that time, it was the one who did it (Fero) just listening to all the complaints of Janet until it was finished, then Fero embraced and hugged Janet and said "You have to be strong, I'm sure you can. Remember, I'm always here, so it's a good spirit." While laughing, Fero said "It's a bit better, but at least that's what can make him (Janet) calm down a bit".

Based on what Slamet and Fero stated in giving moral support, giving emotional support and providing motivation would stimulate athletes who really needed such support. Drastic changes would make the athletes experienced emotional height and desperately needed a place to vent all their feelings by telling stories. Communication is the basic foundation so that athletes could feel close and they were not awkward in expressing all their emotions. This was very useful for families and close relatives to know what was needed and what needs to be done to help the athlete got out of the turmoil of the problems being faced.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This study used an interpretative phenomenology approach to find out the experiences of family and people closest to them when the athletes were in the period of retirement from professional sports. Some families and close relatives felt that there were not too many changes experienced, but their roles were adjusted and one of them experienced a change in increasingly close relationships.

The process of support focused more on how communication and encouragement were done to strengthen the athletes. Some of the relatives felt that there was no change and they only supported every decision made by the athlete fully. The support provided during the period of the athlete's retirement was in the form of moral support and motivation to strengthen the athletes.

Intense communication was very useful to strengthen the relationship between them so that trust and encouragement could be easily received by the athletes. Then it was the thing that helped to identify the needs of the athletes.

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