



RESEARCH ARTICLE

## An Investigation of Social Capital in Athletes

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### ABSTRACT

Analysis of social capital state in each community is a necessary and important affair because social capital is helpful to understand how these social elements can enhance the performance of individuals to reach different purposes. On the other hand, sport is a social and cultural phenomenon. The multi-dimensional phenomenon such as penetrated and perforated in the world of human life that today thought, lifestyle and the social capital of individuals could be recognized based on the attitude and sport activities of individuals. To study the social capital of athletes, 200 athletes from 15 to 29 years in Tabriz were selected using stratified random sampling and responded to the standard questionnaire of Onyx and Bullen social capital. Descriptive and inferential statistics (KS, T and ANOVA) was used for data analysis. The results showed that the social capital difference in athletes is significant in terms of gender and occupational status but there are no significant differences in social capital of athletes depending on the type of exercise, age, marital and educational status.

**Key words:** social capital, gender, athletes, team sports, individual sports





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## INTRODUCTION

Social capital is a new concept that in the past two decades has attracted attention of science and research scholars and in particular sociologists to its own. The capital may have a variety of functions and outcomes. In general, social capital is seen as a collective benefit, because it is also in the interest of the causative and benefit of others as a product of social relations. Thus, we cannot restrict conceptions of social capital (1).

A man named Hanan applied the concept of social capital for the first time in 1920 and after half a century delay, Jane Jacob studied it again in 1960 due to living in the big cities of America and observe of American citizens' death. Look for him in the 1970s, Glen Lourie, critic and Ivan Light, sociologist used the term for identifying the social useful sources, human capital development and description of the urban economy problems (2). Social capital is one of the multifaceted concepts in the social sciences that is considered scientifically and academically in the early twentieth century and from 1980 entered to the political science and sociology texts. First, it was discussed by Jacob, Bourdieu, Passeron and Laurie but is expanded by those who like Coleman, Bart, Putnam and Portez (3). Bourdieu has been proposed the first systematic analysis of social capital that is the strongest analysis among the analyses that entered the concept of social capital in the discourse of classical sociology (4,5). He identified three types of capital such as economic, social, cultural, respectively (6). Although the social capital is a new and emerging concept in the field of social studies but it has root in human social relations.

Today, it is clear that achieving development, civil society, international standards and suitable context for social living is only formed in presence of social capital (7). Hence some sociologists such as Coleman knows social capital contains an aspect of on social construct that facilitates the relationships and interactions of individuals who are within the structure and is generator and creator. Like other forms of capital and make possible to achieve certain goals that weren't attainable in its absence (8). In the present era, exercise as a multidimensional device leaves great impacts in different areas. Today it reflects its role in health of people, having healthy, joyful and enjoyable leisure time, education especially in the young generation, creation of healthy social relationships in the community, prevention of diseases, prevention of corruption and social obliquities. Exercise is one of the ways that help people to overcome on physical, mental psychological and social pressures resulting from living in the present turbulent and stressful world (9).

Socialization is part of the human personality development whereby the person prefers group values to the individual values and replaces it to the individual values. Therefore, development of sport activities in society and propel of people to participate in the exercise can reduce stress, social order disruptive emotions and behaviors, demonstration of collective and in particular national identity, respect for the social rules and provision of physical health. So, today, in all human societies, sport is considered as a human-educative affair and appliance of universal social and even economic phenomenon of power and politics in the international community. So that do exercise is vital to people in industrialized societies and need of today communities to healthy human resources is tangible more than any other time. On the other hand, in communities where there is a lack of quality and quantity in the field of sport, the society is retarded in many ways. That is why it is studied and assessed in the developed countries of the world as a social and psychological phenomenon and an important economic factor in addition to its health effects and important role in determining the health of nation (10). Sport is a social and cultural phenomenon, which it has prompted people to interact and engagement in a social network that has complex social relations and becomes the emergence context of behaviors, attitudes, values and meaningful representations of the present century. The multidimensional phenomenon such infiltrated and penetrated in the world of human life that today, thought, lifestyle and social capital of individuals could be recognized in accordance to the attitude and sport activities of individuals (11). It plays an important role in creation of social capital and help to the communities, trust development, openness and respect for different individuals and groups. This can lead to more cooperation and higher levels of unity and social cohesion in those communities. (12). Sport is considered as a device for accumulation of the social capital, which, in turn,





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it improved civic pride, identity of community, power and consistency and significantly assisted to the trust and interactions. In this regard, it helps to overcome barriers and cultural differences and to contribute in public health is valuable (13). Age is one of the factors affecting the formation of social capital. It usually is known based on the childhood, adolescence, adulthood, parenthood and retirement. Social participation of individual at different age levels is different since age is different in various periods based on income and leisure time (14). Glaicer in his research (2000) has shown that the age variable plays an important role in social capital and curve of the social capital relation with age is in the form of an inverted U (15). However, due to parallel change of age with income, education, job opportunities, family and marital situations variable, we can analyze change in the level of social capital in different age periods (14).

Studies show that there is a significant relationship between social capital and employment status and the employed have more association activity than the unemployed ones. For example, knitter, weaver and accounting staff has the lowest level of social ability and doctor, police and clergy has the highest levels of social ability (14). Gender is a variable that affects social capital, so that more participation of men than women in the labor force increased their official contribution toward women. Sex also affects on the type of forum membership in a way that women more participate in servicing -charitable, church, PTA and cultural associations and men are interested to participate in political associations, on the other hand, researchers such as Spellerberg, Esetone, Hughes and Putnam are considered gender as a factor affecting the social capital (14). Putnam who is the most famous theorists of social capital argues that most of sports due to their nature are relational activity and participation in sport include informed participation of individuals as participants and spectators, which have interrelations with each other and in effect of this interaction, social rewards exchange between them. He defines social capital as the relationships between individuals that represent certain features of social life like networks, norms and mutual trust and sub product of social interactions that it makes cooperation of these interactions easier and more likely for participants (16).

Harris (1998) says that exercise can be used to promote new relationships and friendships and social communication that often is in class or moral and religious boundaries. This could include players, non-player participants (e.g., teachers) and the audience and resulting in an increase of the trust and reciprocity norms. In other words, exercise creates connections between different social groups and networks (17).

Interest to examine the relationship between social capital and sport is growing with emphasis on the sport role in promoting social communication. Uslander (1999) and Putnam (2000) also have an interest in this area, from their view, participate in sport usually with providing opportunities for people to lead to the development of social trust and generalization of the interaction norms (18,19).

Parsa Mehr and Turkan (2012) in a study by title of Social Capital and Sports participation of nurses achieved to the results that between social capital and sports participation level of nurses has significant relationship, also there is a significant relationship between trust and security, social interaction with sports participation (20).

Safiri and Sadafi (2012) in a study as meta-analysis of gender and social capital researches and studies have concluded that between there is a relation between sex and social capital and social capital of men is more than women (21).

In addition, Afshani and colleagues (2012) in a study to measure social capital among students of Yazd and Isfahan University found that the social capital of male students was more than female ones and between the staff was more than unemployed. There is a significant relationship between age variable and educational status with social capital (14).

Kamran (2010) in a study entitled with study of the relationship between network social capital and mental health found that the married workers has more social capital and mental health (22).







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Findings of Sharepour and Hosseini Rad (2009) in investigation of the relationship between social capital and sports participation (case study of 15-29 year old citizens of Babol city) showed that the components of friendly relationships, trust to friends, trust to neighbors, neighborly relations and do volunteer works have significant correlation with sports participation (1).

In research of Firouzabadi (2005) that is done in the Supreme Cultural Revolution council, the obtained results are as follows: education is one of the affecting factors of the social capital. Middle ages with a mean age of 51 years compared to young adults with a mean age of 25 years have higher social capital. Men have more social capital than women (23).

Rosso (2012) in a study with title of beyond the entertainment and fun: personal social networks and social capital in transfer of young players from their recreational soccer to official clubs of soccer achieve to the results that there is a relation between the progress of players and social capital. Social capital can have both negative and positive effect on progress and promote of players. Social capital can lead to development through the strong social networks by connecting to the cultural capital.

On the other hand, the negative consequences of social capital include consideration of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, culture and gender discrimination occurs through social networks that impedes success and progress of players. Women suffer more from this negative aspect, which could be due to gender discrimination in sports (13).

Clopton (2012) in an article with title of "social capital, gender and athletic student" achieve to these results that there is a significant relation between sex of athletic students and type of sport (individual sport and team or group sports).

Based on the results of this study, female athletes who were in team sports have more social capital than the women who were in individual sports but male athletes who were in individual sports have more social capital than the team athletes (24).

Otson, Jeppesen and Krstrup (2010) in their study on social capital development through soccer and running in inactive women achieve to the result that both these exercises develop social capital but social capital development through soccer and running is different. Social capital increases more through group sports like soccer than the individual sports. In fact, the advantage of group sports in social capital development is more than the individual sport (25).

Aihara et al (2009) in a research with title of the social capital recognition in elderly women and men concluded that cognitive social capital in older men is more than older women (26). Schultz (2007) in an article with title of tennis role in creation of social capital concluded that: tennis as an individual sport creates more social capital per unit of activity than the team sports (27).

Delaney and Keaney (2005) in a study entitled Sport and Social Capital in the UK compares sports and social capital with other European countries and refers to the relationship between social capital and sports (28). Tonts (2005) in a study entitled competitive sport and social capital in the villages of West Australia notes that there is a significant relationship between exercise and their access to social capital. This paper shows that exercise is an important arena for creating and maintaining of social capital (17).

What attracts attention of sport scholars to the social capital is that the type and amount of people's social interaction in the field of sport have social and economic consequences for the community. The researchers found that the active people in the field of sports have more social capital than the inactive ones (29). Unfortunately, many studies have been conducted in various fields but few researches have been done in the area of social capital and exercise at different levels in particular elite athletes. The present study examines social capital in athletes based on gender, sport type, employment status, marital status and age.





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## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research is applied and descriptive- survey. With respect to the functions and effects of exercise and social capital in social life of people, the present study aims to investigate the social capital in the athletes.

The statistical population of the study included all athletes of sports teams (15-29 years) in Tabriz in 2013-2014 year. 100 female Elite athletes and 100 male elite athletes from different sports including individual strands (Taekwondo, karate, table tennis, swimming and badminton) and team (soccer, futsal, volleyball, handball, basketball) were selected using stratified random sampling and the necessary information were collected using the Onyx and Bullen (30) standard questionnaire. Cronbach alpha of questionnaire in the study population is 0.81. So the present study has acceptable stability. In addition, the questionnaire has acceptable validity based on the study of physical education professors and sociology. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to evaluate the normal distribution of variables' scores that the results showed all variables have normal distribution.

## RESULTS

The obtained results from the individual properties of the statistical sample in the study show that among athletes, education level: 21.5 percent were under diploma, 31.5 percent were diploma, 6 percent were associate degree, 35/5 percent were bachelor, 5.5 percent were BA or higher. One hundred of the participants were women and 100 were men. Forty-seven persons were in the age group of 15 to 19 years, 69 people were 20 to 24 years and 84 people were in the age group of 25 to 29 years old.

As it can be seen in Table 1, based on t-test results, social capital among male athletes was significantly higher than the female athletes ( $p=0/001$ ). The results showed social capital of team athletes have no significant differences with individual ( $p=0/804$ ). Few difference between married and single athletes was not significant in terms of social capital ( $p=0/428$ ). The present different between unemployed athletes and employed ones in amount of social capital significant ( $p=0/001$ ) and employed people have more social capital.

For study of hypothesis, one-directional variance analysis was used to that the results showed difference of people in social capital with different educational levels ( $p=0/403$ ) is not significant.

The obtained results of one-directional variance analysis showed that there is no significant differences in social capital of different age groups ( $p=0/186$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to evaluate social capital status in male and female elite athletes. As shown in the present study, amount of social capital among male athletes is significantly higher than the female ones. Therefore, the study confirmed that gender has a significant impact on social capital that is compatible with the results of Safiri and Sadafi (2012), Seidan and Abdul Samadi (2011), Bastani and Salehi (2007), Afshani (2012) and Aihara (2009) researches but is not consistent with Clopton (2012) study. The cause of this misalignment back to different research environments, social and cultural differences with the research study. The origin of gender differences in social capital is rooted in the social structure that is the result of social and cultural context, which has created much discrimination. Existence of special and different expectations from women toward men intensifies their relative deprivations in the social network. The phenomenon prevents women from wide relations based on mutual trust and interaction types that are available for men. Therefore, with appropriate culture building can improve the discriminations. Based on these researches, one of the negative consequences of social capital is sexism that is





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obvious in sport(31). Thesexismin sport of our country especially in the area ofchampionship and professional sport canbeseen.

In our society, women due to the present culture and positions do not have equal opportunities with men. In the field of sport, existing facilities for women are less than the men have. Therefore, we suggest women, like men, have the same opportunity and facilities to meet their competence. Formation of the women's League in various fields, professional contracts, increasing women's sports capital are factors that improve the position of women in sport. The obtained findings of the hypotheses testing showed that the social capital among the athletes of individual courses and team sports is not significant, which is not consistent with the results of Colpton(2012), Ottesen(2010), Schultz(2007) and Seippel(2006) researches. Schultz concluded that tennis as an individual sport creates more social capital per unit of activity than the team sports and in accordance to Putnam(2000) and Ottesen(2010) results, team sports develop social capital more than the individual sports do. According to our findings, there is no significant difference between individual and team sports. As Tonts stated in his findings, there is a geographical aspect to the relationship between social capital and sport. The tool and device of evaluation and the analysis level are impressive in the studies too. In justification of non-alignment can consider different measurement tools, different geographic location and sport facilities of countries and based on Seipel(2006) idea consider the sport governance structure of countries. Also in the study in contrast to the aforementioned studies that were limited to a particular individual and team sport, various types of individual and team sports were evaluated that could be the reason of the study's misalignment with the previous ones.

Based on the other finding of the study, social capital of the employed people is greater than the unemployed ones. Difference between the employed and unemployed people in terms of social capital has been obtained in other studies of Nateghpour (2005), Afshani(2010) and Safiri(2011). While some researchers have shown that individuals in occupations that are more social able have greater social capital. Further efforts of officials to increase the employment rates especially among young athletes and educators can be an important and positive step in raising social capital.

The study showed that there was no significant difference in social capital of athletes based on marital status, which was consistent with study of Parsamehr, (2012) who found there was no difference between the social capital of married and unmarried nurses. Considering the findings of other researchers in this field have shown that marital status has a significant impact on social capital that it is recommended to do more researches on the athletes.

According to this study, there is no significant difference in social capital and educational status of athletes, which is consistent with the study of Afshani (2011).

Another finding of the study showed that there is no significant difference between various age groups in terms of social capital that is not consistent with researches of Firozabadi(2005) and Afshani(2011) who found there is a relationship between the social capital and age. As research has shown that, the age variable plays an important role in social capital and curve of the social capital relationship with age is in the form of a reversed U. At first, they invest in the social capital formation with increasing age and then with increase of age from one level, the investment on the social capital decreases (32). Thus lack of difference based on the age in social capital of athletes could be the result of the subject that tests were at the same stage namely in youth.

Finally, according to the results of this study that showed the social capital in athletes is influenced by gender, so it is suggested to provide equal opportunities for women and men like more hours of exercise gym. In addition, with creation of special sport spaces for women, support of women's sports, holding of cultural, recreation and voluntary programs for athletic women provide suitable context for their participation and increase







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their relationships in the sport community. The results showed that the social capital is not different based on the type of exercise, so with both individual and team sports can increase the development context of social capital in the community. It is suggested that the governments invest equally on both these exercises at all levels of sports participation.

In addition, due to the difference of the employed athletes' social capital with the unemployed ones, officials' should create job opportunities to increase employment rates especially among young and educated athletes and have led to an important and positive step in enhancement of social capital.

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**Table1: Independent T-test results to compare social capital in athletes based on gender, marital and employment status.**

| Dependent variable | Independent variable | number | mean | Standard deviation | Levine test |                  | T-test    |                |                  |
|--------------------|----------------------|--------|------|--------------------|-------------|------------------|-----------|----------------|------------------|
|                    |                      |        |      |                    | Statistic F | Meaningful level | statistic | Freedom degree | Meaningful level |
| Social capital     | male                 | 100    | 5/17 |                    | 0/08        | 0/767            | 3/54      | 198            | **0/001          |
|                    | female               | 100    | 4/56 | 1/26               |             |                  |           |                |                  |
| Social capital     | single               | 166    | 4/84 | 1/21               | 0/094       | 0/760            | -0/794    | 198            | 0/428            |
|                    | married              | 34     | 5/01 | 1/27               |             |                  |           |                |                  |
| Social capital     | unemployed           | 120    | 4/61 | 1/25               | 0/195       | 0/660            | -3/501    | 198            | **0/001          |
|                    | employed             | 80     | 5/23 | 1/24               |             |                  |           |                |                  |
| Social capital     | Individual sports    | 100    | 4/87 | 1/28               | 0/955       | 0/330            | 0/294     | 198            | 0/804            |
|                    | Team sports          | 100    | 4/84 | 1/26               |             |                  |           |                |                  |







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**Table2: Results of one-directional variance analysis test for comparison of social capital in the educational groups**

|                        | Sum of squares | Freedom degree | mean | f     | meaningfulness |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------|------|-------|----------------|
| Between group variance | 6/47           | 4              | 1/62 | 1/011 | 0/403          |
| Intra-group            | 311/78         | 195            | 1/60 |       |                |
| Total                  | 318/25         | 199            |      |       |                |

**Table3: results of one-directional variance analysis to compare social capital in age groups**

|                        | Sum of squares | Freedom degree | mean | f    | meaningfulness |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------|------|------|----------------|
| Between group variance | 5/39           | 2              | 1/62 | 1/70 | 0/186          |
| Intra-group            | 311/78         | 197            | 1/59 |      |                |
| Total                  | 318/25         | 199            |      |      |                |

