

Original Article

Identifying and analyzing factors affecting athletic commitment to the armed forces

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Abstract: This study aimed to identify and analyze the factors affecting the athletic commitment to train and compete in the armed forces. The research method was applied, and the study's statistical population consisted of athletes affiliated with the Armed Forces across the country, of whom 290 were selected as the sample. For data collection, in the beginning, the qualitative method and interview with elites were used, then the quantitative method containing a demographic questionnaire and sport commitment questionnaire (researcher-made) with 33 questions is used. The questionnaire comprises six dimensions: facilities, incentives, rules and regulations, financial and personal factors, and enjoyment and satisfaction. Collected data through equation modeling were analyzed using Amos 21 software and SPSS 22 software to identify the factors affecting the variables. The results showed that the research model had a good fit, and a positive and significant relationship existed between facilities and incentives, incentives, rules and regulations, finances, personal factors, and enjoyment and satisfaction with sport commitment. Finally, it is recommended that the physical education managers of the armed forces take advantage of all the national facilities to increase their athlete's athletic commitment.

Keywords: Sport, Commitment, Armed Forces, Equipment, Enjoyment, Incentives, Facilities.

1. Introduction

Choosing an active lifestyle is the main priority of health. Many studies have shown that sports activity is an effective way to promote health in addition to disease prevention and treatment after discovery (Tan and Shao 2021). Sports inevitably exist in humans' cultural and social life—interests, excitement, and pleasure shape choices in sports. The basic principle that increases sports participation and commitment is designing sports-related programs based on people's needs (Atilgan et al., 2021). In order to effectively achieve their goals, developed countries have prioritized the health of human resources and, as a result, sports activities in their policies and programs so that they can achieve a higher position in international relations (Sha'bani, 2017). Therefore, sport is one of the essential human activities that has become a social institution in the new era due to its expansion and inclusion, and its performance is considered one of the necessities of life (Kargar et al., 2013). Experts believe that if society encourages its people to exercise, it has helped to increase their self-esteem and physical and mental health (Salehi et al., 2010). They are because knowing the factors affecting participation in physical activities and sport is one of the critical issues at the level of society and sport, one of the essential concepts used to understand and recognize the factors that determine the behavior of sports participation is commitment. Commitment is an attitude and mental state used to describe people's tendency toward certain behaviors. This concept shows the level of perseverance and stability of people to continue participating in a behavior. From another point of view, commitment is a feeling of dependence and belonging to a specific behavior (Scanlan, 1993). Commitment is a state of personality in which a person is limited and bound through the actions and activities he performs, and due to doing these actions, a belief is created in the person that he should continue doing such activities and keep an effective engagement to do them. Therefore, motivation makes a person move to achieve a goal, and commitment is a force that keeps a person on the path to reaching the goal until he reaches his goal (Hosseini, 2013). Shahid Motahari says this about commitment: Commitment means adherence to principles and philosophy or contracts that a person believes in and is stable to them (Motahari, 1989). One of the classifications of kinds of commitments include moral commitment, organizational commitment, existential commitment, and sports commitment. In this research, we discuss sports commitment. The issue of commitment to sports activities is one of the fundamental issues in physical education and sports; commitment is the key to starting any work and activity and can stimulate, strengthen and guide people's behavior or control and stop it. Scanlan et al. (1993) have defined sports commitment as a psychological concept that shows

interest and desire and paves the way to continue participation in sports. This concept represents the mental state of athletes participating in sports (Scanlan, 1993). *Sports commitment* is the desire and determination to continue participating in a specific sport or sports activity in general (Casper et al., 2008). This concept shows the level of perseverance and stability of people to continue participating in a behavior. In a more precise statement, sports commitment is a psychological state that shows a person's desire and decision to continue participating in sports. The Increase in sports commitment can be significant and necessary in developing athletes' mental skills, identifying mental weaknesses and strengths, strengthening and preparing people, or implementing specific sports skills in serious competitive situations (Ramezani Nejad et al., 2005).

One of the ways to use the benefits of sports activities is that people have the necessary commitment to sports activities and engage in sports activities continuously (Shibani, 2014). People are motivated to participate in sports activities, and they commit themselves to continue it when they get many benefits for the time of effort and resources invested (Scanlan, 1993). Studies have shown that long-term exercise affects a person's personality traits and prepares a person to face social problems. Among the effects of regular exercise are improving the quality of life and increasing decision-making power; therefore, in order to have a better and livelier society, sports commitment should be promoted among all classes of society (Ismaili, 2013).

The existence of the armed forces is a prerequisite for the national survival of the country. No alternative has been found to solve the concerns arising from how the government is managed without the existence of military forces. Therefore, sports managers in the armed forces should provide the conditions for their employees' participation in various sports competitions in different fields for them and soldiers with detailed planning while improving the physical fitness of their employees (Derakhshan, 2005).

The most popular form of sport in societies is championship sport. This popularity and attractiveness exist among the armed forces as well as other classes, and due to the job characteristics of the employees of the armed forces, it is more necessary for them than other members of society; because physical fitness is an integral part of their job characteristics. This category becomes clear for them when discussing the military forces and the importance of their sports and physical fitness that they should maintain their readiness in all days, months, and years to defend the nation and the country against the enemy when necessary and rush to the aid of their fellow citizens in every great calamity. In addition to the fact that championship and professional sports in any country show the level



of development and progress of physical education in that country, today, the world championships of armed forces sports are held in the world with particular splendor and order. Another reason for the importance of championship and professional sports in the country's armed forces is that many male athletes in many sports majors are growing and developing at the teenager level, and at this stage due to their physical presence in the garrisons (during the period of military service) they are practically prevented from training, camps and domestic and international competitions. In this regard, not only are they prevented from developing individual talents, but the lack of planning in the championship and professional sports of the armed forces has led to reducing the quality level of domestic competitions and, more importantly, in international arenas, especially for CISM competitions (world's military competitions) (Sha'bani, 2017). Considering the necessity and importance of sports for the armed forces and the correct assessment of attitudes and needs can have positive consequences, such as identifying strengths, developing more effective programs, and providing motivational feedback. Also, it has been observed many times that the athletes who have joined the teams of the armed forces from other teams for serving military service did not show in the military team the efficiency and commitment they had in their previous team and have been forced to play to spend the time of military service. This causes the service clubs to be disappointed and have no desire to continue working in professional sports. On the other hand, the lack of commitment among the armed forces causes a decrease in internal cohesion among athletes (Saadat Talab et al., 2015).

Today, thinkers and theoreticians of international relations generally believe that the military preparedness of any system and government, which results from a powerful military organization, is one of the critical elements of the "national power" of that country and system. The Islamic system is not only not exempt from this rule, but because there are numerous internal and external enemies in front of its goals and ideals, it needs solid and capable armed forces more than other systems. Although today the war is fought with modern weapons, none of the military experts have denied the necessity of physical fitness and sports activities for the military men. Military units are in charge of the dangerous task of defending the land, establishing security, and repelling the threats of enemies in every country; therefore, they need a human force adorned with knowledge and intelligence, combined with strength, physical and mental endurance, and courage. Increasing the armed forces' physical and mental fitness is an essential and effective factor. As much as it is necessary to increase the readiness of the forces, maintaining this readiness is also very important and practical because there is a possibility

of encroachment on the country in any situation, and the territorial integrity of this country can be defended only if there is readiness. Since the armed forces are considered one of the essential organs of the country and, in some cases, they need peace of mind, paying attention to their exercise can be one of the critical factors in this field, giving them unique peace. Therefore, it is vital to examine commitment as a factor affecting performance. The current research seeks to answer the fundamental question of what factors are important and influential on the sports committee of athletes affiliated with the armed forces.

Shafii Nik studied the views of 265 police officers and showed that the improvement of the intra-organizational component indices, including security, respect, justice, the possibility of progress, employee participation in decision-making, and physiological needs, are directly related to the organization's commitment (Shafii Nik, 2013). Dehghan Nia et al. (2013), in research entitled "Analysis of the quality of work-life of police forces and its relationship with organizational commitment," studied the quality of work-life of Isfahan police forces and its relationship with their organizational commitment and showed that the quality of the police forces work-life was at an average level. However, the organizational commitment of the police forces is at a high level. Also, the findings indicate a positive and significant relationship between the quality of work-life factors and the three dimensions of organizational commitment among police forces. Theodosiou (2005) states that the real motivations of the participants in sports determine the motivational atmosphere that dominates the atmosphere of training and sport, which is the factor influencing the continuation of sports participation. Young and Medic (2010) considered social support, especially family, to be effective in increasing sports commitment in athletes. Garcia et al. (2010), in the research they conducted regarding commitment, enjoyment, and motivation in football players, stated that motivation (extrinsic and intrinsic) is effective in sports commitment and enjoyment. However, it should be noted that extrinsic motivation has a more significant contribution to enjoyment.

In comparison, intrinsic motivation plays a more significant role in commitment. The armed forces are the central pillar of protecting the country's borders and security; a social institution that is effective in direct and indirect authority and developing other social institutions. Health and physical ability are significant features of this institution (Saadat Talab, 2015). Therefore, according to:

- what was mentioned about the concept of commitment,
- the importance of this factor in sports,
- cultural conditions of our country,
- the special conditions of the armed forces,
- the lack of research on the topic,



the purpose of this research is to identify and analyze the factors affecting the sport commitment of athletes affiliated with the armed forces.

With sufficient knowledge of the critical and influential factors and components, one may provide the necessary plans to create the best conditions for the athlete troopers.

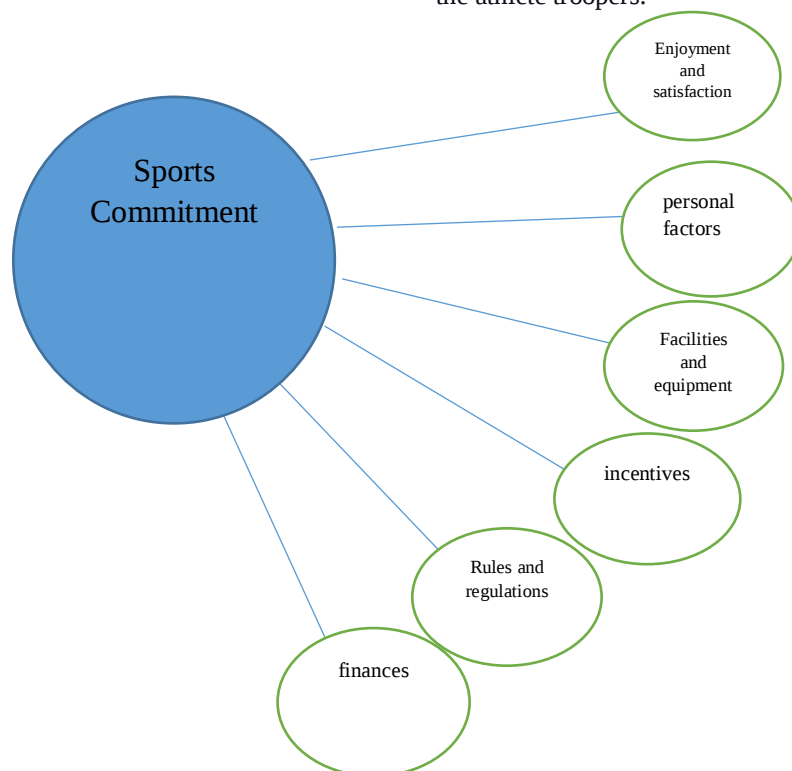


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the research

2. Methods

The research method is mixed (qualitative-quantitative) in terms of its practical purpose and the nature of the data. This study is based on the mixed research approach. *Mixed research* is conducted using the combination of two sets of quantitative and qualitative research methods (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The qualitative research's statistical population included several interviews with experts, trainers, and military officials, which were used to identify the factors affecting the sport's commitment of athletes affiliated with the armed forces. Therefore, until this research reached theoretical saturation, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with seven people who could provide richer information. The statistical population of the research in the quantitative part also includes all the athletes who were active in the sports teams of the armed forces. Sampling was used in the quantitative part in a probabilistic and available type.

According to the statistics obtained from the physical education of the armed forces, the size of our society is 1200 athletes. Therefore, the number of samples, considering the number of questions, was estimated between 66-330. Therefore, 330 samples were selected, of which 290 questionnaires were completed and analyzed as samples. To collect

information, questionnaires of demographic characteristics (5 questions) and sports commitment (researcher-made), 33 questions were used. The sports commitment questionnaire consisted of 33 questions, which measured six subscales; enjoyment and satisfaction, personal factors, facilities and equipment, incentives, rules and regulations, and finances. These questionnaires were arranged on a five-point Likert scale (from disagree entirely to agree). The face and content validity of the instrument was confirmed after reviewing and considering the opinions and suggestions of 10 experts. Before distributing the questionnaires among the research sample, in a guided study, 30 questionnaires were distributed among the athletes, and the reliability of the sports commitment questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha correlation coefficient of 0.75. After collecting the data, descriptive statistics methods (frequency, average, standard deviation) were used to describe the demographic characteristics (Table No. 1). For the inferential analysis of the data, Cronbach's alpha test was used to determine the distribution of the research data, skewness and kurtosis method, and structural equation model analysis was used to determine the relationships between variables in the form of a causal model. In this regard, two software, Amos version 21 and SPSS version 22, were used.



3. Results

The demographic specifications of the research subjects showed that the highest number of subjects was 21-23 years old (87 people). The results also showed that only two subjects had a doctoral degree and higher, and the highest number had a diploma

degree and was lower than a diploma (84 people). In addition, the results showed that 65.5 % of the subjects were single, and 34.5 % were married. The record of playing in the country's leagues also showed that most subjects had between 1-4 years of experience in national leagues (41 %).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

	variable	frequency	percentage
Age	18-20	80	27.6
	21-23	78	30
	24-26	71	24.5
	27-29	30	10.3
	30 and older	22	7.6
Education	Diploma and lower	84	29
	Associate	80	27.6
	Bachelor	72	24.8
	Master	52	17.9
	Doctoral and higher	2	7
The record of Playing in country's leagues	1-4 years	98	33.8
	5-8 years	119	41
	9-12 years	53	18.3
	13 years and higher	20	6.9

The data collection was carried out in two stages; In the first stage, existing documents and literature on sports commitment were collected, studied, and analyzed. In the next stage, the research continued by conducting semi-structured interviews. After reading and implementing the interviews, their content was coded, analyzed, and studied. Then, the questionnaire was prepared using the relevant codes, and the results were provided quantitatively in later stages.

One of the assumptions of using multivariate statistical methods, such as modeling structural equations, is that the normality of a single variable and multivariate distribution of research data can lead to inaccurate conclusions if disregarded by the researcher. Thus, multivariate normality was examined through the skewness and kurtosis of the single variable normality and using Mardia's coefficient (1.16) (Klin, 2011), and the assumption of non-normality of multivariate distribution of data was rejected. Then, structural equations were analyzed to study the relationship between variables and direct, indirect, and total effects. Since there is no general agreement among the experts of structural equations modeling on which one of the indices of the fit model provides a better estimation of the model, it is suggested that a combination of three to four indices be reported. (Klin, 2011). As a result, in

the current study, among the indices of absolute fit, the Chi-Square Indices and the goodness of fit index (Gfi) and the parsimonious fit indices, root mean square error of approximation (Rmsea), and the ratio index of Chi-Square to the degree of freedom (χ^2/df) and among the comparative fit indices, Tucker-Lewis fit index (TLI), incremental fit index (If), as well as the comparative fit index (Cfi), were used. Experts have offered different cut-off points for fit indices. For example, in the comparative fit Index, whose range of changes is between zero and one, values above 0.85 indicate a relative fit model (Kelloeay, 1998), and values above 0.90 indicate a good and acceptable model fit. Values above 0.95 indicate a perfect and excellent fit of the model (Bentler, 1999), for the root mean square error of approximation (Rmsea), values of less than 0.08 indicate the model is acceptable and reasonable, and less than 0.06 indicate a good and appropriate model (Bentler, 1999). The Chi-Square index indicated that the difference between the observed and estimated matrix was not significant. This indicates the appropriate fit of the model, but due to the sensitivity of this index to the sample size, it is referred to as the ratio index of Chi-Square to the degree of freedom. In the case of the Chi-Square to the degree of freedom, some researchers consider



values less than three to be acceptable and good (Kelloeay, 1998), and some others consider the values of two to five to be reasonable and appropriate for the model (Mesch et al., 1998). The existence of numerous components in the

regulated model has led the researchers that before the regulated model is estimated and tested in the first step, initially present measurement models be estimated and tested.

Table 2. indices of the fit research structural equation model

Fit Indices	Observed Values
Chi-Square	106.65
Degree of Freedom	60
significance level	0.001
Ratio of Chi-Square to the Degree of Freedom	1.77
Goodness of Fit Index	0.89
Comparative Fit Index	0.95
Tucker-Lewis Fit Index	0.93
Incremental Fit Index	0.87
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation	0.07

Overall, the regulated measurement model for athletes' sports commitment was supported by the collected data; Overall, total fit indices of the model

show desired status that indicates the appropriateness of the structural equation model (Table 2).



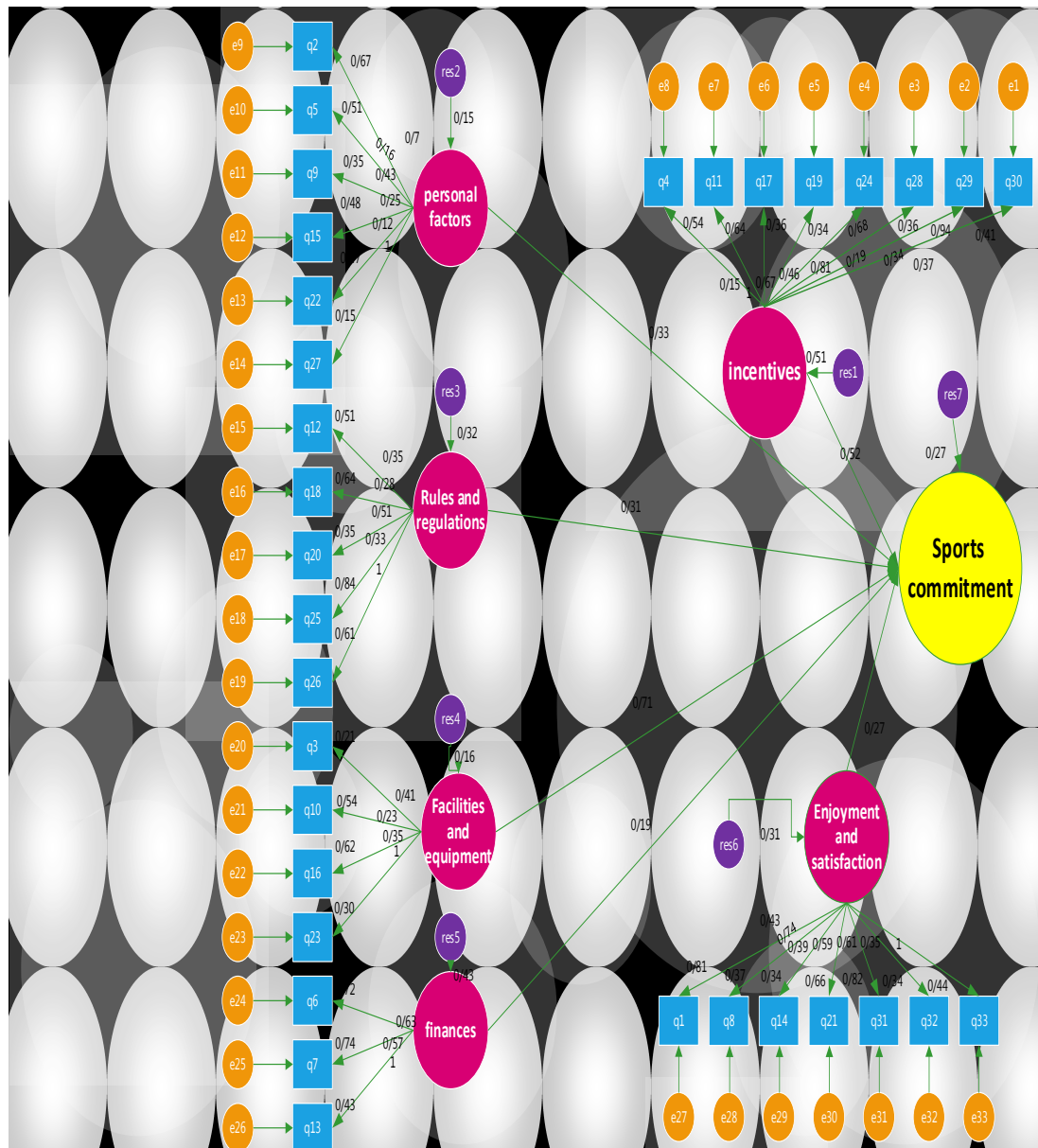


Figure 2. structural equation model of research with standard impact coefficients

Once the model fit with the data was logically proved, the significance of the model components

and the relationships between the variables is also evaluated

Table 3. regression weights of research variables in structural equation model

Variables	Standardized regression weights	Unstandardized regressi on weight	standard error	Critical ratio	Significance level
Enjoyment and satisfaction---> sports commitment	0.27	1.13	0.24	4.57	0.001
personal factors---> sports commitment	0.33	0.47	0.14	2.67	0.001
Facilities and equipment---> sports commitment	0.71	0.59	0.09	6.48	0.001
Incentives---> sports	0.52	1.04	0.1	9.67	0.001



commitment					
Rules and regulations- --> sports commitment	0.31	0.73	0.12	5.89	0.001
finances---> sports commitment	0.19	1.31	0.12	10.32	0.001

4- Discussion

Human force is considered the most important capital of any organization, and the more desirable and higher this capital is, the greater the success, survival, and improvement of the organization; therefore, much effort should be made to improve the quality of human resources, because this action is both for the benefit of the organization and for the benefit of individuals. Athletes are considered a kind of human force, an efficient and trained force that can be used in the best possible way in times of crisis, especially in an essential and effective organization called the Armed Forces, which is responsible for protecting the borders of the country. However, this action does not only include specialized training but also includes improving people's attitudes and adjusting values. On the other hand, commitment is a kind of attitude and inner feeling towards the organization, job, or team, influencing his judgments, performance, and loyalty towards the organization. Now, if this organization's task is essential, its commitment doubles. Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyze the factors affecting the sport's commitment of athletes affiliated with the armed forces. The current study showed that various factors affect the sport's commitment to athletes affiliated with the armed forces. These factors were identified according to the importance of facilities and equipment, incentives, rules and regulations, finances, personal factors, and enjoyment and satisfaction.

The research results showed a positive and significant relationship between facilities and equipment and sports commitment. This means that the presence of high and advanced facilities increases the sports commitment and its lack or absence reduces the athletes' sports commitment. This finding was in line with the results of studies by Jahantab Nejad et al. (2018), Poursoltani Zarandi et al. (2016), Mohammadi et al. (2017), Tondnevis and Ghasemi (2017), Saffar and Azimzadeh (2017). Facilities and equipment have always played a prominent role in the development of athletes from the past until today, increasing athletes' sports commitment. Officials and

managers of sports and physical education teams of the armed forces should pay special attention to this basic factor because it is a determining factor in the future of athletes. The military teams active in the country's sport can make significant progress in their activities with the facilities that the armed forces have at their disposal in the country and different cities. Also, this progress in international arenas can attract the attention of the world toward the authority of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The research results showed a positive and significant relationship between incentives and sports commitment. This finding was in line with the research results of Irani et al. (2013), Ghorbani et al. (2013), Emami et al. (2013), and Rahmani et al. (2011). Kashef et al. (2011), in research entitled "identifying motivational factors, personality traits, and social components," concluded that external components such as family support create the most motivational role in volunteers. It is clear that strengthening the factors that increase the motivation of athletes and soldiers, such as giving rewards, live broadcasting of matches, the absence of backed players, and other factors studied in this research, are of great importance. The research results showed a positive and significant relationship between rules and regulations and sports commitment. This finding was in line with the studies of Omidi et al. (2016), Samadi and Heydari (2017), and Jaramillo et al. (2005). The officials of physical education of the armed forces can increase the commitment among the soldiers by changing some of their rules regarding athlete soldiers and giving discounts to the soldiers, and this increase in commitment has a direct relationship with the performance increase in the sports teams. Other research results showed that the economic dimension is positively and significantly related to sports commitment. This finding is also in line with the research of Moshgel Gosha and Tejari (2010), Asghari Zadeh and Saidi Nejad (2011), and Chye Koh and Boo Ehy (2015). Miller (2005), after a study on the professional baseball league in the United States, stated that the performance of the players in the clubs that use planned cash rewards is



better than the players in other clubs. Also, the players playing in England football who received cash or non-cash rewards over the amount specified in their contract during a season, compared to the players who only received the amount specified in their contract, were less likely to leave their club (William, 2000). Being aware of this issue, sports managers can change how they pay athletes to be more satisfied. Among other research results, we can mention the positive and significant relationship between personal factors and sports commitment. This finding was in line with the results of studies by Parsamehr (2012), Mirhosseini et al. (2012), Vahdani et al. (2016), Rahimi et al. (2017), Hemati et al. (2018). Regarding personal factors, it can be stated that psychologically, these factors can have tremendous effects on the players. In terms of cost and financial issues, it can be stated that it does not have a high cost for the trustees. Therefore, it is possible to achieve a great result at a low cost because the mental preparation of the players and soldiers is in the first place. The current studies' results showed a positive and significant relationship between enjoyment and satisfaction with sports commitment. According to this finding, it is highly likely that if the athletes enjoy their sport and have complete satisfaction, their sports commitment will also increase. This finding is in line with the research results of Scanlan (2009), Boyst (2012), Moradi et al. (2017), Irani et al. (2013), Nowroozi Seyed Hosseini et al. (2012), Keshavarz et al. (2014), Andam et al. (2013), Hosseininia et al. (2014). This finding was not in line with the results of Nasrpak's research (2017), which he conducted with a research entitled "studying factors affecting sports commitment of Iranian football coaches." Perhaps the reason for this inconsistency is the difference in the statistical population of the research. Scanlan et al. (1993) have defined enjoyment as an effective and positive

response to participation in sports activities based on previous sports experiences, which reflects generalized feelings and emotions based on pleasantness, communication, and entertainment. Also, they introduced positive social interactions, support from others, increased individual perception of physical ability, effort in learning and exhibiting skills, and a sense of mobility as sources of enjoying sports. (Hosseini Nia et al., 2014). Therefore, according to the research results, the physical education managers of the armed forces must increase the sports committee of the armed forces athletes openly and with a more serious approach to increase the sports committee of their athletes. The sports managers of the armed forces can use all the hardware and software facilities available in the country and use these facilities to greatly help increase the athletes' sports commitment to increase their sports commitment. Since the military units are in charge of the dangerous task of defending the country, establishing security, and repelling the threats of enemies in every country; also, considering the current conditions of the world and the region and the strategic position of our country; therefore, a human force adorned with knowledge and intelligence, combined with strength, physical and mental endurance and courage are the priorities of any military force. On the other hand, considering the benefits of having sports commitment in athletes, which increases teamwork, individual and club development, a sense of satisfaction in the individual, increase in performance, and other things, therefore, the study of commitment as a factor affecting performance is of importance.

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شناسایی و تحلیل عوامل مؤثر بر تعهد ورزشی ورزشکاران وابسته به نیروهای مسلح

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چکیده: هدف پژوهش حاضر، شناسایی و تحلیل عوامل مؤثر بر تعهد ورزشی ورزشکاران وابسته به نیروهای مسلح بود. روش پژوهش، از نظر هدف کاربردی و جامعه آماری تحقیق را ورزشکاران وابسته به نیروهای مسلح سراسر کشور تشکیل می‌دادند که از این تعداد ۲۹۰ نفر به عنوان نمونه تحقیق انتخاب شدند. برای جمع‌آوری داده‌ها، ابتدا از روش کیفی و مصاحبه با نخبگان استفاده شد و سپس از روش کمی با استفاده از پرسش‌نامه‌های جمعیت‌شناختی و پرسش‌نامه تعهد ورزشی (محقق‌ساخته) که ۳۳ سؤال داشت، استفاده شد. این پرسشنامه شامل شش بعد امکانات و تجهیزات، مشوق‌ها، قوانین و مقررات، مالی، عوامل فردی و لذت و رضایتمندی بود. برای شناسایی و تحلیل عوامل مؤثر بین متغیرها، داده‌های گردآوری شده از طریق مدلسازی معادلات، با استفاده از نرم‌افزار ایموس نسخه ۲۱ و نرم‌افزار اسپس نسخه ۲۲ مورد بررسی قرار گرفتند. نتایج نشان داد که مدل پژوهش از برازش مطلوبی برخوردار بود و بین امکانات و تجهیزات، مشوق‌ها، قوانین و مقررات، مالی، عوامل فردی و لذت و رضایتمندی با تعهد ورزشی رابطه مثبت و معناداری وجود داشت. در نهایت، به مدیران تربیت بدنی نیروهای مسلح توصیه می‌شود که با بهره‌گیری از تمامی امکانات در سطح کشور، زمینه را برای افزایش تعهد ورزشی ورزشکاران خود فراهم نمایند.

واژه‌های کلیدی: تعهد ورزشی؛ نیروهای مسلح؛ امکانات و تجهیزات؛ تربیت بدنی؛ نیروهای مسلح؛

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این نماد به معنای مجوز استفاده از اثر با دو شرط است یکی استناد به نویسنده و دیگری استفاده برای مقاصد غیرتجاری.