

A Review of the Existing Literature on the Positive and Negative Aspects of Sports on the Psychology of People

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ABSTRACT: Sport can be defined as a fair play physical activity or game that provides entertainment through the display of physical abilities and skillfulness, organized by categories such as age and sex, and regulated by a set of rules and customs. Several studies focus on the physical impacts of sport on a person such as increased body strength, flexibility, lean body mass and reduced risk of cardiovascular diseases. However, we cannot talk about the physical impacts without looking at the psychological impacts. Reviews by (Jetzke and Mutz, 2019) have pointed out the significance of physical exercise on an individual's mental health. These impacts could be positive or negative. This article has been produced to summarize some of the key findings in this field.

KEYWORDS: Sport Psychology; Positive Effects; Negative Effects; Sports and Mental states

I. INTRODUCTION

Mental health could show zero to severe symptoms. It is characterized by levels of thinking, emotional state and behavior. Morgan et al, notes that physical activity is associated with good mental health and emotional wellbeing according to cross sectional studies. Moreover, a longitudinal study shows the relationship between physical activity and reduced risk of developing a mental disorder. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), 20% of youth between the ages of 13-18 suffer from mental illness which could be depression, anxiety, and tendencies of suicidal thoughts. NAMI (2017), also states that, the highest cause of death on the youth is through suicide or underlying mental diseases with most of the students suffering from it having to drop out of school.

There is an increase of severe mental illness according to Mental Health America (MHA) where the rates increased from 5.9% in 2012 to 8.2% in 2015, and 75% of the affected youths have little or no treatment at all. However, according to Guarin (2018) research has shown that exercise and physical activities have a positive impact towards mental health issues. Sports could be carried out by an individual or in a group. There are high chances of individuals who started to participate in sports from a younger age to develop a normal life. This is because optimum changes of an individual normally occurs during their childhood and adolescent stages. Arsivic et al, states that most people who participate in sports, end up giving a positive result on feeling better, happier and satisfied after an exercise.

Positive aspects:

Firstly, research has found that engaging in sport promotes positive relationships. Since the main part of sport entails interacting with people, the positive effects can be seen in the psychosocial development of a person. Sport programs provides a brotherhood and sisterhood environment where team mates feel that they can express themselves freely. This enables them to build social liaison with other members thus improving their social skills and confidence.

Secondly, sports boost one's self-esteem and decreases depression. A report by D'Anna (2015) showed that young adolescents who were initially shy have gained higher self-esteem after joining sports. This was attributed to the acquisition of a sense of self-worth and the ability to disregard fear as their skills increased through continuous training. Moreover, a report published by the Women's Sports Foundation in 2009 called "Her Life Depends on It" emphasized that girls who participated in sports showed higher self-confidence, have positive body image and are unlikely to be depressed in comparison to those living a sedentary lifestyle. Stress, anxiety and depression can cause moodiness and lack of enthusiasm in activities that an individual used to find enjoyable. This can lead to unhealthy eating habits such as constant snacking which could have detrimental consequences, for example, obesity if left unchecked. Nevertheless, consistent physical activity improves one's self control, increases a person's energy and reduces depression.

Staying physically active not only makes you physically fit, it also benefits your emotional and mental health. When your body is in move, your body releases chemicals that make you feel happier and relaxed. Participating in a group sport will give you the benefit of positive social interaction. It is also a way of distracting yourself from challenges and stress you could be going through. Additionally, when participating in sport your body produces endorphins which fight stress and depression and gives you a feeling of empowerment, relaxed and optimistic. According to an article by the Advent health, teens who participate in sports have less feelings of depression and stress, leading to an improved mental health state.

However, it is not considered as a form of treatment. Sports can only be used as a stress management strategy to improve recovery, prevent recurrences, manage side effects of medicine and to improve health and lifestyle. According to Merkel (2013), adolescents participating in sports were less likely to take health risks compared to the non-athletes. Additionally, female teens participating in sports reduce the chances of having breast cancer, osteoporosis, heart disease and obesity in future. They are also most likely to reach higher academic goals and less likely to get involved in sexual activities that could lead to early pregnancies. Suicidal thoughts decrease with the increase of physical activity for both teenage boys and girls engaged in physical activity.

The International Society of Sport Psychology (1992), notes that exercise can help reduce various stress indicators, have an emotional effect in both sexes, and regular exercise reduces the chances of having chronic diseases. Arsavic et al notes that, athletes are less anxious, less compulsive, emotionally stable and more socially adaptable compared to non-athletes. The impact of physical activity carried out by an individual is the same as pharmacological therapy for depression and psychotherapy. Moreover, moderate sporting activity, results to positive emotions. Youths who are actively involved in sports, tend to have a more positive attitude towards life (Hiremath, 2019). Additionally, children who actively engaged in sports showed a reduction in social anxiety, self-control, confidence, social skills and are seen to be relate positively among their colleagues. Therefore, sports show a positive outcome in relation to social skills and self-esteem. Moreover, teens that participate in sports are at a better mental place compared to their inactive peers. Participation of sports, is in relation to positive self-concept. Youths involved in sports have are more psychologically resilient and are able to recover from problems. Social isolation can be prevented through sports participation (Hiremath, 2019).

Gisladiotirr (2013), states that there is a notable difference between different levels of sport participation in sports clubs, body image, mental condition and physical condition in over 10,000 students between the ages of 14-16. With young people battling with different mental illness that their elders or friend are unable to understand, they can be able to handle their stress, anger and frustrations by transferring their emotions into competition and practice. Exercise increases hippocampal volume and also improves memory in schizophrenia patients (Takahashi et al, 2012). Students who engage in sports demonstrate more psychosocial benefits and resilience in their character.

Sports participation would result to a positive effect on extrastriata body area that responds selectively to static human bodies and body parts n chronic schizophrenia and psychiatric symptoms (Takahashi et al, 2012). Moreover, patients suffering from schizophrenia have shown a positive effect from sports participation. For the people involved in team sports, they acquire a sense of good understanding towards each other, good interpersonal communication and body awareness. According to the aforementioned study, sports have an underlying therapeutic advantage not only to schizophrenic patients but also to patients suffering from other mental type of diseases. Another positive aspect of sport is that it reduces suicidal thoughts. Data from the Centers for Disease Control 2005 Youth Risk Behavior indicates that active individuals are less likely to be suicidal or feel hopeless due to the team support system in place providing a feeling of belongingness and social support.

Furthermore, The Centers for Disease Control recommends sports as a solution for suicidality due to the rise in suicide rate among teenagers. Pate RR Trost SG (2000) and Taliaferro LA, (2008) adds that the positive psychological element of sports have proven to be the reason behind the reduction in suicide rates among young adults in the United States. By the same token, it is evident that engaging in physical activities is beneficial to a person's mood and social relations. This has been directly linked to a chemical known as endorphin which is released by the nervous system during a vigorous exercise, the chemical helps to reduce pain and stress while also triggering positive feelings in the body allowing the body to relax. It has been referred to as a medication in motion because once you complete your exercise or training, you will have forgotten the problems that you had.

On top of that, physical activity not only minimize unhealthy lifestyle that stem from inactivity but also gives the participant satisfaction from achieving the goal or winning the game, encourages self-worth, increases social

intelligence and better goal-setting skills. Additionally, persistent involvement in sports from childhood encourages healthy habits that becomes imprinted into one's mind from a young age that help them cope and overcome stressful situations even in adulthood. For example, competitive sports such as soccer and basketball require critical thinking under pressure. This forces one to think fast and make decisions promptly. The same techniques applied here would be the same that an individual applies when faced with stressful situations in life.

These habits reinforce positive behavior in an individual. Reports by Barnett and Smoll (1992) have found that players are more motivated and contented because of the productive training provided by the coaches. In addition, sports also help one to develop essential motor skills achieved through years of practice. This can be seen when a player is able to accomplish something without even thinking. Lastly, involvement in sports reduces high risk behaviors such as alcohol consumption and usage of hard drugs. All sports discourage the use of hard stimulant drugs and alcohol and any player who engages in these risks being disqualified and sometimes expelled completely from the game.

Negative aspects:

On the other hand, sports that are too competitive can have negative effect on a person's mental state. Historically, sports have been known to be competitive in nature, majorly because to the awards and prizes promised at the end of a game. The term "winner takes it all" have resulted into sports getting too competitive as payers from each team aims to outdo each other. Although competitive sport teaches players how to work under pressure, it can cause more harm than good when it becomes too competitive that the players feel the pressure to win and not let down their team mates. This may lead to anxiety and cause a loss in self- confidence. Highly competitive sports can also lead to over training while trying to perfect on skills. This can make an individual to miss out in other aspects of life. It can also get boring over time causing the player to lose interest in that particular sport.

Lang M (2014) illustrates that having the "win at all cost" mentality makes the players, especially children and teenagers to be shallow and have a misrepresented beliefs and values that prompt them to do anything to win. This can result in psychosocial disorder and cognitive dissonance of the athlete while they convince themselves that the end justifies the means. It also encourages cheating. Moreover, sports can cause serious self-esteem issues. Women's Sports and Fitness Facts and Statistics (2013) mentions that coaches are like extended family and what they say to their players can impact them either positively or negatively. They further explain that commenting negatively on the weight and food portion of a player can cause increased body awareness and lower self-esteem. Bad coaches who are too critical may also cause the players to quit when they feel that they are not living up to their coaches' standards.

Likewise, specialization and ill-suited expectations to achieving scholarships/professional career can also lead to unhealthy behavior. Early sport specialization among children have been documented to promote peer isolation and lack of cooperation skills. Society have been known to pressure young children to pick a single sport to focus on to enable them to have a greater chance at future benefits attached to that particular sport such as scholarships to the best colleges or playing at professional level. This motivates the athlete to concentrate on becoming a star and disregard other vital aspects of life. Similarly, parents can unintentionally contribute to grief and anxiety for the athletes by setting unrealistic goals for them in terms of performance even though these athletes especially when they are very young may be disinterested in continuing with sports as children are known to change their minds frequently. Students from not so well-off backgrounds also tend to go to extreme measures such as using steroids and overtraining to excel in sports and satisfy their irrational family members. Steroids have negative side effects like anxiety which can interfere with their everyday lives.

Another negative impact of sport can be attributed to the high rates of attrition. Favoritism in sports and increased pressure from coaches and parents have made sport less enjoyable for the players. Unqualified coaches may favor one player whom they believe is the best and as a result put a lot of pressure on him/her causing them to burnout all the time and lose the will to play. Other times, the same coaches will often bench a player they feel is not good enough. This player may develop resentment as a result of being left out and lose the confidence to continue playing. Such negative sporting occurrences can lead to negative social behaviors among young athletes.

A report by Brenner (2016) presents reduced training motivation as one of the negative aspects of sport. This could be caused by many factors including negative environments that involves yelling at the players by coaches, looking down on them, judging their eating habits and frequent fights between coaches and parents. Research from Organized Youth Sports Today indicate that such negative behaviors by coaches impact negatively on the

players' ability to perform effectively. Most importantly, increased stress to be an elite player have also been reported to have some negative effects. Athletes may sometimes be forced to play while injured by their coaches who emulate professional players. This destroys the relationship between the coach and the player who more often than not end up quitting sport.

In addition to this, professional athletes who retire from elite sports usually have a difficult time trying to cope with their new identities after exiting the only thing they have known almost their entire lives. Studies have revealed that most retirees fall into drug addiction, depression, eating disorders and anxiety disorders. Barry Hall, an Australian AFL star disclosed on a television show "insight", how he was so accustomed to a particular routine that he developed eating disorder and depression after retirement. Retirement leaves these athletes feeling useless and powerless as they try to adjust to their new reality of no or little physical activities.

Sports participation could be advantageous and could also be a disadvantage to an athlete's mental health (Chang et al). A few studies point out depression to be a big social problem affecting athletes and the normal population. Athletes could be exposed to psychological issues contributing to mental illness. Guarin (2018), notes that not all sports participation could be beneficial and there could be a negative impact coming from the sports coaches. Additionally, student athletes who participated in sports reported more injuries. Rice et al (2016), notes that there is low research on how athletes' injuries are handled and prevented and also on their mental well-being Athletes are normally put under pressure on their psychological and physical state which could make them more likely to suffer from certain mental illness and risk-taking behaviors that could overlap as they age.

Athletes face physical and competition stress at their work place, from the public, social media, limited support network resulting from relocation, group dynamics and are likely to suffer injuries that could end their career. How they cope with the stressors highly determines their mental being and success in sports. They also avoid seeking help due to stigmatization, shallow understanding on mental health and how it could be an influence in their career and as it is seen to be a sign of weakness when seeking for help.

Intense physical activity performed by elite athletes was found to compromise their mental well-being therefore, increasing symptoms of anxiety and depression that results from injury and the physical and emotional exhaustion. Some athletes could also be at risk of having eating disorders and getting suicidal. A national survey of athletes in Australia stated that, retired athletes are more likely to be at an elevated risk of getting mentally ill due to low rates of formal athlete mental health screening processes and lack of enough support in relation to mental health (Rice et al, 2016). Some personality traits could be associated with a successful athlete and also could be associated with Mental Health disorders. Chen et al points out how depression among elite athletes is unclear and how it is underestimated, therefore, they are likely to have higher depressive symptoms compared to the general public.

Boxing is one of the sports that put their players' mental and physical health at risk. Players are not only supposed to maintain a certain weight but they are also put in the danger of suffering concussions and rapid weight loss. When a player experiences a concussion, the structural and morphologic changes of the brain's mood centers involving, hippocampus, amygdala, and prefrontal brain regions could be affected (Chen et al, 2020). Additionally, teenage athletes may experience difficulty in flexibility, coordination and balance which could affect their performance in sports leading to feeling of anxiety, stress and social pressure.

II. CONCLUSION

In as much as we enjoy the fun and thrill from sports, measures should be put in place to help deal with the psychological distresses among athletes so as to nurture positive sporting experiences. These measures should also aim to eliminate the stigma associated with mental health that prevents athletes from speaking up. Therefore, we have a challenge to find a balance between the positive and negative aspects and develop a support system that would be available for athletes that require psychological assistance.

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