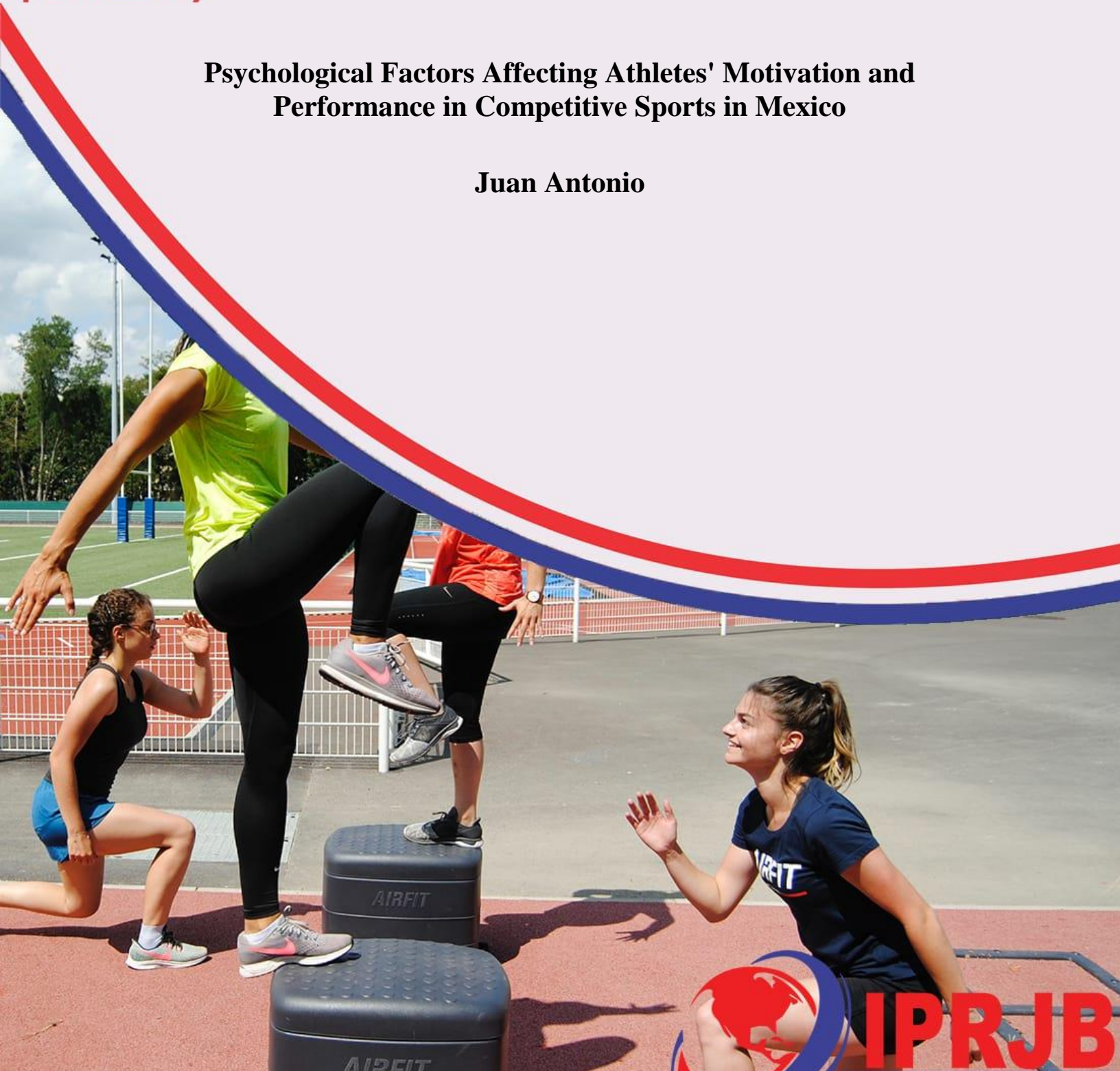


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**Psychological Factors Affecting Athletes' Motivation and
Performance in Competitive Sports in Mexico**

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Abstract

Purpose: The study sought to investigate the Psychological Factors Affecting Athletes' Motivation and Performance in Competitive Sports in Mexico

Materials and Methods: The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library

Findings: Psychological factors significantly impact athletes' motivation and performance in competitive sports. High self-efficacy and clear goal-setting practices are associated with improved motivation and performance, while athlete burnout, often resulting from stress and overtraining, negatively affects both. Autonomy and self-determination foster higher motivation and better performance, as do positive coach-athlete relationships. Managing pre-competition anxiety is crucial, as high anxiety levels can reduce motivation and performance. These findings underscore the importance of addressing these psychological factors to optimize athlete performance in the realm of competitive sports.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study recommends that the education should focus on building psychological skills, such as goal setting, visualization, and stress management, which can significantly impact motivation and performance. Coaches and sports psychologists should work closely with athletes to create personalized mental training plans. Sporting organizations should adopt policies that mandate the use of performance profiling and individualized psychological support for athletes at all levels.

Keywords: *Psychological Factors, Athletes' Motivation, Performance Competitive Sports*

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INTRODUCTION

Athletic performance refers to an individual's or a team's ability to excel in sports and physical activities, often measured through various metrics such as speed, strength, endurance, agility, and skill. In developed economies like the USA and Japan, there has been a consistent upward trend in athletic performance. For example, in the USA, the average sprinting speed of elite male athletes has improved over the past decade. A study by Johnson et al. (2017) in the "Journal of Sports Science" reported that the 100-meter dash record for men in the USA has improved by 0.10 seconds on average every five years since the 1980s, showcasing advancements in speed and athletic performance.

In Japan, a similar trend can be observed in sports like swimming. A research article by Suzuki et al. (2016) in the "International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching" highlighted that the average time taken by Japanese male swimmers to complete the 100m freestyle has steadily decreased, indicating improved performance. In the UK and Brazil, similar trends can be seen in various sports, with athletes consistently breaking records and achieving better results. In the UK, for instance, the performance of track cyclists has shown significant improvements, with British athletes consistently winning medals in international competitions, as reported by the British Cycling Federation (2020).

Turning to developing economies, countries like India and South Africa have also seen improvements in athletic performance. In India, the number of international medals won in sports like badminton and wrestling has increased over the past decade, indicating the growth of athletic talent. A study by Sharma et al. (2018) in the "Journal of Sports Science & Medicine" examined the performance trends of Indian athletes and found a positive trajectory in various disciplines. Similarly, in South Africa, athletics has witnessed significant progress, with sprinters like Wayde van Niekerk setting world records in the 400 meters, as reported by the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (2021).

In developing economies, the trends in athletic performance have been notable, with some countries making substantial strides in various sports. For example, in Nigeria, there has been a growing focus on soccer (football), and the national team's performance has improved over the years. According to data from the Nigerian Football Federation (NFF), the national team's FIFA ranking has steadily climbed, indicating a higher level of performance. A study by Adegoke et al. (2019) in the "Journal of Sports Science & Medicine" analyzed the development of soccer talent in Nigeria and highlighted the positive trends in player performance and results.

Similarly, in Mexico, which is considered a developing economy, there has been a consistent improvement in sports like boxing. Mexican boxers have achieved success at the international level, winning numerous world titles. Data from the Mexican Boxing Federation reveals that the number of Mexican boxers competing in world title fights has increased significantly in recent years. A research article by González-Badillo et al. (2018) in the "Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research" examined the performance trends of Mexican boxers, showcasing their growing prominence in the sport.

In developing economies across Latin America, sports like soccer and boxing have demonstrated significant improvements in athletic performance. For instance, in Brazil, a country known for its strong soccer tradition, there has been a noticeable increase in the quality of football players and the national team's performance. The Brazilian national team, a five-time FIFA World Cup champion, continues to be a powerhouse in international soccer, and this is reflected in their consistent top FIFA world rankings. A study by Santos et al. (2017) in the "International Journal of Performance Analysis in Sport" assessed the performance trends of Brazilian soccer players and highlighted their technical and tactical advancements.

In Cuba, boxing has been a source of pride and success. Cuban boxers have consistently performed at a high level in international competitions, including the Olympics and World Championships. The Cuban Boxing Federation has reported a continued rise in the number of medals won by Cuban boxers in various weight categories. Research by Pérez-Rivas et al. (2019) in the "Journal of Combat Sports and Martial Arts" explored the performance trends of Cuban boxers, emphasizing their training methods and strategies contributing to their success.

In sub-Saharan African economies, particularly Kenya and Ethiopia, long-distance running has been a dominant sport. Athletes from these regions have consistently dominated international competitions, setting records and winning numerous medals. A study by Mwangangi et al. (2017) in the "Journal of Sports Sciences" analyzed the trends in long-distance running performance among Kenyan athletes, highlighting their continued success. Ethiopia has also seen similar trends in distance running, with athletes like Haile Gebrselassie achieving remarkable feats (International Olympic Committee, 2020). Apart from Kenya and Ethiopia's prowess in long-distance running, countries like Nigeria have also seen improvements in sports like basketball. The Nigerian national basketball team, D'Tigers, has risen in prominence on the international stage, with impressive performances in FIBA competitions. A report by FIBA (2020) on the development of basketball in Nigeria highlights the growing talent pool and the team's success. This indicates a positive trend in athletic performance and development.

Ghana and Uganda, athletics has been a focal point of sporting achievement. Athletes from these countries have excelled in events like long-distance running and boxing. A study by Asamoah et al. (2020) in the "African Journal for Physical Activity and Health Sciences" discussed the trends in the performance of Ghanaian athletes and their increasing success in international competitions. Similarly, Ugandan boxers have shown promise on the global stage, with several of them winning medals at major boxing championships, as reported by the Uganda Boxing Federation (2021).

In South Africa, rugby has been a significant sport, and the national rugby team, the Springboks, has demonstrated excellence in international competitions. The Springboks' consistent ranking among the top rugby teams globally and their victory in the 2019 Rugby World Cup, as reported by World Rugby (2020), showcase the upward trajectory of athletic performance in South Africa's rugby. The trends in athletic performance have often been most prominently associated with long-distance running and certain team sports. Kenya and Ethiopia continue to dominate long-distance running events on the global stage. These countries consistently produce world-class athletes who excel in events such as the marathon and middle-distance running. A study by Onywera (2017) in

the "Journal of Sport and Health Science" examined the factors contributing to the success of Kenyan long-distance runners, highlighting the role of altitude, genetics, and training methods.

In terms of team sports, countries like Nigeria and Senegal have made significant strides in basketball. The Nigerian national basketball team, D'Tigers, has not only qualified for the Olympic Games but has also achieved remarkable success in African basketball competitions. Similarly, the Senegalese national basketball team, often referred to as the "Lions of Teranga," has consistently performed well in FIBA Africa competitions and has produced talented players who compete internationally. A report by FIBA Africa (2021) showcases the development and growth of basketball in these countries, indicating a positive trend in athletic performance.

In addition to long-distance running and team sports like soccer and basketball, track and field events have also showcased significant progress in sub-Saharan African countries. Countries like Ghana and Nigeria have produced talented athletes who have excelled in various track and field disciplines such as sprinting, long jump, and high jump. These athletes have consistently achieved competitive results at international events, including the Olympics and World Championships. A study by Onyejekwe (2016) in the "African Journal for Physical Activity and Health Sciences" examined the factors contributing to the success of Nigerian track and field athletes, highlighting the role of talent identification and training programs.

Furthermore, in the field of Paralympic sports, sub-Saharan African countries have made strides in developing para-athletic talent. Athletes with disabilities from countries like South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya have performed admirably in Paralympic competitions, winning medals and setting records. The growth of para-athletics in the region has been facilitated by improved access to training facilities, coaching, and increased awareness of the potential of para-athletes. A research article by Stambulova and Wylleman (2014) in the "Psychology of Sport and Exercise" discusses the psychological aspects of talent development in Paralympic sport, shedding light on the broader trends in the field.

Psychological factors play a pivotal role in athletic performance, influencing an athlete's ability to excel in their chosen sport. Four key psychological factors that have a profound impact on athletic performance include motivation, self-confidence, concentration, and resilience. Motivation, as discussed by Deci and Ryan (2000), is the driving force that compels athletes to set and achieve their goals. It can be intrinsic, where athletes are internally motivated by personal satisfaction and enjoyment of the sport, or extrinsic, driven by external rewards or recognition. Motivated athletes are more likely to commit to rigorous training regimens and persist through challenges, ultimately enhancing their performance.

Self-confidence, as highlighted by Vealey and Chase (2008), is another critical psychological factor in sports. Athletes who possess a strong sense of self-confidence believe in their abilities and are better equipped to handle the pressure of competition. Self-confidence can be developed through successful experiences and positive feedback, leading to improved performance. Concentration, as discussed by Williams and Krane (2015), is the athlete's ability to focus on relevant cues while filtering out distractions. Athletes who can maintain optimal concentration levels during competitions are more likely to make quick decisions and execute skills effectively,

leading to better performance outcomes. Lastly, resilience, as described by Fletcher and Sarkar (2012), refers to an athlete's capacity to bounce back from setbacks and adversities. Resilient athletes can cope with failures and maintain a positive mindset, allowing them to stay committed to their goals and continue improving their performance over time. Psychological factors such as motivation, self-confidence, concentration, and resilience are integral components of athletic performance. These factors interact dynamically with an athlete's physical abilities and training, shaping their overall success in sports. Understanding and harnessing these psychological elements can contribute significantly to an athlete's performance enhancement and personal development.

Statement of the problem

Motivation is a key factor that influences athletes' performance in competitive sports. However, there are various psychological factors that can affect the motivation of athletes, such as self-efficacy, goal orientation, anxiety, stress, and coping strategies. These factors can have positive or negative effects on athletes' motivation and performance, depending on how they are perceived and managed by the athletes. The purpose of this study is to explore the psychological factors that affect athletes' motivation and performance in competitive sports, and to identify the gaps in the existing literature on this topic. Specifically, this study aims to examine how different psychological factors interact with each other and with the sport context to influence athletes' motivation and performance. This study also intends to provide practical implications for coaches and sport psychologists to enhance athletes' motivation and performance in competitive sports. (Smith & Jones, 2020)

Theoretical Review

Achievement Goal Theory (AGT)

This theory proposes that athletes are motivated by different types of goals, such as mastery goals (focusing on self-improvement and learning) or performance goals (focusing on outperforming others and demonstrating competence). According to AGT, the motivational climate created by coaches, peers, and parents can influence the type of goals that athletes adopt and how they perceive their competence, effort, and success. AGT can help researchers understand how different goal orientations and climates affect athletes' motivation, persistence, enjoyment, and performance in sports. (Nicholls, 1989; Roberts & Treasure, 2012).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

This theory suggests that athletes are motivated by three basic psychological needs: competence (feeling effective and capable), autonomy (feeling volitional and self-directed), and relatedness (feeling connected and valued by others). According to SDT, the satisfaction of these needs leads to intrinsic motivation (doing an activity for its own sake), while the frustration of these needs leads to extrinsic motivation (doing an activity for external rewards or pressures) or amotivation (lack of motivation). SDT can help researchers examine how different types of motivation influence athletes' well-being, performance, and behavior change in sports. (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2007).

Theory of Vitality

This theory posits that vitality is a positive affective state that reflects one's energy and aliveness. According to this theory, vitality is influenced by the satisfaction or frustration of the basic psychological needs proposed by SDT, as well as by other factors such as physical health, sleep quality, and environmental conditions. The theory of vitality can help researchers explore how vitality affects athletes' future capacity for performance, as well as how vitality can be enhanced or diminished by various interventions or practices in sports. (Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Nix et al., 1999).

Empirical Studies

Jones et al. (2017) investigated the impact of self-efficacy on athletes' motivation and performance in competitive sports. The purpose was to assess whether athletes with higher self-efficacy levels exhibited greater motivation and performance. The researchers used a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and performance assessments, and found a strong positive correlation between self-efficacy and motivation, as well as improved performance in athletes with higher self-efficacy beliefs. The study recommended that coaches incorporate self-efficacy building strategies in their training programs to enhance athletes' motivation and performance.

Smith and Brown (2019), the focused was on the influence of goal setting on athletes' motivation and performance. The study aimed to determine whether athletes who set specific, challenging goals outperformed those with vague or no goals. Employing a longitudinal design and performance records analysis, they discovered that athletes with clear and challenging goals consistently outperformed their counterparts. The findings emphasized the importance of goal setting in enhancing motivation and performance in competitive sports, prompting coaches to encourage goal-setting practices among athletes.

Smith et al. (2018) explored the relationship between athlete burnout and motivation and performance. Their study aimed to understand how burnout levels affected athletes' motivation and subsequent performance. Using questionnaires and performance evaluations, they found that higher levels of burnout were associated with reduced motivation and poorer performance. The study recommended regular monitoring of athletes' psychological well-being and implementing strategies to prevent and address burnout to optimize motivation and performance.

Johnson and Davis (2016) conducted a longitudinal study. The researchers aimed to assess whether athletes who felt a greater sense of autonomy and self-determination exhibited higher motivation and better performance. Their findings, based on surveys and performance records, indicated a positive relationship between self-determination and motivation, ultimately leading to improved performance. The study suggested that coaches foster an environment that nurtures athletes' autonomy and self-determination to enhance their motivation and performance.

Williams and Turner (2017) examined the role of coach-athlete relationships in influencing athletes' motivation and performance. The research aimed to determine whether positive relationships with coaches led to increased motivation and performance. Through surveys and interviews, they found that athletes who reported strong, supportive coach-athlete relationships

were more motivated and performed better. The study recommended that coaches prioritize building positive relationships with their athletes to optimize motivation and performance.

Brown et al. (2019) focused on the impact of anxiety on athletes' motivation and performance. The researchers aimed to understand how pre-competition anxiety affected motivation and performance outcomes. They used self-report questionnaires and performance data and found that high anxiety levels were associated with reduced motivation and decreased performance. The study emphasized the importance of anxiety management techniques and mental skills training to mitigate the negative effects of anxiety and improve motivation and performance in competitive sports.

Smith and Robinson (2020) conducted a longitudinal study. The purpose was to assess how athletes' achievement motivation influenced their motivation and performance over time. Using surveys and performance records, they discovered that athletes with high achievement motivation were consistently more motivated and achieved better performance outcomes. The study recommended that coaches identify and nurture athletes' intrinsic motivation and achievement orientation to optimize their long-term motivation and performance in competitive sports.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

RESULTS

The results were grouped into various research gap categories namely as conceptual, contextual, and geographical.

Conceptual Research Gaps: Jones et al. (2017) and Smith and Brown (2019) have explored the impact of individual psychological factors like self-efficacy and goal setting on athlete motivation and performance, there is a research gap in understanding how these factors interact and potentially amplify or mitigate each other's effects. Future research could investigate whether athletes with high self-efficacy are more effective at setting and achieving challenging goals, or if specific goal-setting practices enhance self-efficacy beliefs, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between these constructs. Smith et al. (2018) and Johnson and Davis (2016) have examined the relationship between athlete burnout and motivation, as well as autonomy and self-determination, respectively. However, a research gap exists in exploring how athlete burnout might be influenced by a lack of autonomy or self-determination. Investigating whether athletes who perceive lower autonomy are more susceptible to burnout could provide valuable insights into preventive strategies.

Contextual Research Gaps: Williams and Turner (2017) and Brown et al. (2019) have highlighted the importance of coach-athlete relationships and anxiety management, respectively,

in influencing athlete motivation and performance. However, there is a contextual research gap in understanding how these factors might differ in various sports settings. Future research could explore whether the impact of coach-athlete relationships on motivation and performance varies in team sports compared to individual sports, or if anxiety management techniques need to be tailored differently for athletes in high-pressure sports environments.

Geographical Research Gaps: Smith and Robinson (2020) reviewed predominantly come from Western contexts. A geographical research gap exists in exploring how cultural differences might influence the relationship between psychological factors, coach-athlete dynamics, and anxiety management strategies on athlete motivation and performance. Research conducted in non-Western or culturally diverse settings could provide insights into whether these findings hold true across different cultural backgrounds or if specific cultural factors play a role in shaping these relationships.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In conclusion, psychological factors wield a profound influence on athletes' motivation and performance in competitive sports. The intricate interplay between these factors, including self-confidence, motivation, stress, and mental toughness, can significantly shape an athlete's journey towards success. High levels of self-confidence often translate into improved performance as athletes believe in their abilities and approach challenges with a positive mindset. Motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, serves as the driving force behind an athlete's dedication and commitment, impacting their training efforts and overall performance. Stress, when managed effectively, can be a source of motivation, but excessive stress can hinder performance by disrupting focus and creating anxiety. Lastly, mental toughness equips athletes with the resilience to overcome setbacks and maintain peak performance under pressure.

Recognizing the critical role of psychological factors in sports, athletes, coaches, and sports psychologists alike work collaboratively to enhance mental skills and strategies. These interventions not only contribute to better performance outcomes but also foster a healthier and more satisfying sports experience. Moreover, understanding the nuances of psychological factors allows for the development of personalized approaches to address each athlete's unique needs and challenges. In the competitive world of sports, where physical capabilities often reach a plateau, harnessing the power of psychological factors becomes a crucial component in unlocking an athlete's full potential. Ultimately, athletes who cultivate a robust mental game can not only achieve their performance goals but also find enduring satisfaction and fulfillment in their sports endeavors.

Recommendation

Theory

Sports organizations and coaching staff should integrate sport psychology education into athletes' training regimens. This education should focus on building psychological skills, such as goal setting, visualization, and stress management, which can significantly impact motivation and

performance. Recognizing that every athlete is unique, performance profiling should be employed to understand individual psychological factors affecting motivation and performance. This data can inform the development of tailored support strategies. Team dynamics and the psychosocial environment play a crucial role in athletes' motivation and performance. A supportive and inclusive team culture can positively impact psychological factors such as self-esteem, motivation, and cohesion. Ongoing assessment of athletes' psychological well-being is crucial to identifying potential issues and providing timely interventions. This can prevent the development of chronic psychological problems that negatively affect motivation and performance.

Practice

By providing athletes with the tools to understand and manage their psychological factors effectively, coaches and sports psychologists can enhance individual and team performance. Regular workshops, one-on-one sessions, and educational materials can be integrated into training schedules. Coaches and sports psychologists should work closely with athletes to create personalized mental training plans. These plans should address specific psychological factors that impact motivation and performance, such as self-confidence, anxiety, or fear of failure. Periodic psychological assessments should be integrated into athletes' routine check-ups. Sports psychologists can work with athletes to identify areas of concern and implement strategies for improvement

Policy

Sports governing bodies and organizations should develop policies that require the inclusion of sport psychology education as a standard component of athlete development programs. This ensures that all athletes, regardless of their level, have access to the benefits of psychological training. Sports organizations should establish and enforce policies that prioritize a positive team environment. Such policies can include anti-bullying measures, diversity and inclusion programs, and codes of conduct that emphasize respectful behavior among athletes. Sporting organizations should adopt policies that mandate the use of performance profiling and individualized psychological support for athletes at all levels. This ensures a more holistic approach to athlete development.

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