

***Unleash the Warrior in You: A Mixed Method Study on the
Psychological Well Being of Student Athletes from the University of the East***

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Abstract

Psychological well – being is a balanced, well – integrated, and harmonious interplay between six facets of the self which includes positive relationships, personal mastery, autonomy, meaning in life, personal growth, and development (Ryff, 2018). The researchers’ convergent parallel mixed method study focused on exploring the psychological well-being of UE student athletes in order to help them understand their well-being as a relevant factor in their ability to cope with the rigors of collegiate sports competition and academic requirements. One hundred ninety-one (191) student athletes participated in the quantitative survey using Psychological Well-Being Scale by Carol Ryff to profile their well-being using the six – factor model. In addition, fifteen (15) sessions of semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions were conducted to identify their concerns and challenges. Summary of results revealed the student athletes’ very low autonomy and low average self-acceptance, which are linked to their prevailing issues on personal dilemma and management concerns. Based on converged data analysis, conflict arise from pressure of expectations to deliver win records for various sports track despite prevailing concerns. Further, their re-defined victory is also another area of concern as one may infer here why some would not perform at par to their potentials. As a way to cope with lack of autonomy, they have de-emphasized defeats and focused on giving their all-out effort.

Key Words: psychological well – being, student-athletes, sports psychology

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Introduction

“A sound mind is a sound body, and a sound body is a sound mind.” This remains a common challenge for student athletes in order to maximize their potentials in performing and competing for their chosen sports while attending to the demands of their academic classes. Extensive demands placed on student athletes can be exhausting. Training schedules, lost study time, class absences, as well as emotional and physical stress can place a heavy burden on the student athletes.

Ryff claimed that ensuring high level of psychological well-being among student athletes should be a joint effort of all stakeholders to ensure corresponding impact on global health and well-being as cited by Blanchard, Amiot, Perreault, Vallerand, & Povencher (2009). Well-being studies have found that high level of psychological functioning, adaptive short-term responses of emotions and long term affects among athletes are crucial to perform optimally in high pressure environment over time (Jones, Meijen, McCarthy, and Sheffield, 2009; Lundquist & Kentta, 2010). Well-being helps athletes deal with the diverse challenges they face during their sporting career.

Reviewing the UE Red Warrior’s team standings in the University Athletic Association of the Philippines (UAAP), the university’s overall rank is within the lower one third among all the competing schools from seasons 76 to 80. Based on the records, the researchers aim to explore the psychological well-being of UE student athletes to help them cope better with their sports and academic performance.

Methodology

The study utilized the convergent parallel mixed – methods research design. Specifically, descriptive research method was used in the quantitative phase and phenomenological approach for qualitative phase. The study covered a total of 191 UE student athletes from varied sports track. Purposive Sampling was used with the following criteria for the inclusion of the participants: (1) enrolled as students for school year the study was conducted (2) have joined in intercollegiate sports competition or in UAAP games.

A survey administering the Psychological Well – Being Scale by Carol Ryff was done in the quantitative phase. It is an eighty-four (84)-item test with six dimensions namely autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relation with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Psychological well-being profile was computed using percentage, mean, and percentile ranks. In addition, fifteen (15) sessions of semi – structured interviews and focused group discussions were also conducted. These sessions were followed by steps in thematic analysis including transcriptions, coding, bracketing and generation of themes.

Conclusion

Comparative analysis of the results survey show the strengths of the student athletes including high personal growth, average positive relations with others, average purpose in life and low average environmental mastery. These indicate that they have

trusting relations with others, and capable of empathy and affection. They also have sense of changing for the better. They are somehow aware of how to make ends meet. On the other hand, weaknesses reflected their very low autonomy and low self-acceptance. These connote their lack of internal locus of evaluation and high tendency seek approval from others. As supported by Kimball (2004), the study revealed that student athletes feel the pressure to comply with coaches' control, academic demands, sponsorships, and power dynamics. Thus, they also somehow lack a positive attitude towards themselves. Maturity and optimal functioning also needs improvement.

Further, based from thematic analysis, the researchers were able to formulate two (2) major themes, and six (6) sub themes to summarize their issues, concerns, and challenges. The first major theme is *personal dilemma* under which subthemes include physical struggles, socio – emotional support, academic difficulties, and financial limits. The second major theme of *management concerns* with two sub themes covering community support and coaching style.

The perceptions of student athletes on intercollegiate competitions are analyzed and summarized into three (3) major themes and seven (7) sub themes. The first major theme is anchored on *keeping a positive outlook* with sub themes on topics including overcoming challenges and keeping motivated. The second major theme highlights the student athletes' experiences in *achieving goals* which covers sub themes on sacrifices, perseverance, and becoming better. The third major theme pertains to the student athletes' *redefining victory* with sub themes on de-emphasized defeats and giving an all-out effort.



Figure 1: The Climb

Meanwhile, the researchers used the figure entitled “The Climb” to represent the lived experiences shared by the participants during semi structured interviews and focused group discussions. Their lived experiences have evolved on *balancing between academics and sports* which is reflected by the student athlete climbing the stairs while carrying the books and a ball. The broken stairs reflect the *concerns and challenges of student athletes*. Despite the dangers of traversing through the broken stairs, the student athlete is still trying to navigate his way to the top. In addition, the core support group of the student athletes are their team mates as shown by the group cheering behind the climbing student athlete. Success has been *redefined* by the student athletes as *becoming better* in your craft and *giving your all-out effort* in

sports competitions which is shown on the student athlete standing on top of the stairs. Themes from the analysis reflect the student athletes' capacity to make use of whatever they have in order to get into their target goals for their academics and sports career.

Summary of converged data revealed the student athletes' very low autonomy and low average self-acceptance, which are closely linked to their prevailing concerns on personal dilemma and management concerns. Similarly, converged data analysis showed conflict arising from pressure of expectations to deliver win records for various sports track despite prevailing concerns. Further, their re-defined victory is also another area of concern as one may infer here why some would not perform at par to their potentials. As a way to cope with lack of autonomy, they have de-emphasized defeats and focused on giving their all-out effort.

Recommendations for the second part of the study include establishment of facility for *Sports Psychology Unit* which aims to promote a referral system for student athletes with psychological concerns as well as to help raise concerns on improving sports facilities, training equipment, allowances issues, etc. Likewise, a *Psychosocial Support Program* must be developed for the improvement of self-acceptance and autonomy among student athletes. Collaborative effort of coaches, trainers, and UE Community will be utilized to participate as a support group in the enhancement of the psychological well-being of UE student athletes. Lastly, *Academic Progress Report Program* is necessary to monitor issues related to their academic needs such as class schedules, scholarship slots, academic standing, exam schedules, attendance, and more.

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