

*Enhancing Resilience and Work Effort Through Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment
Group Counseling in Professional Football Players*

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) group counseling on resilience and work effort in a cohort of 30 professional football players. Pre-test and post-test measures utilizing validated resilience and work effort scales were employed to assess changes in participants' psychological well-being and performance-related attributes. The intervention comprised 10 sessions of MAC group counseling, focusing on mindfulness-based practices, acceptance of thoughts and emotions, and commitment to personal values. The study aimed to explore whether the MAC group counseling could effectively enhance resilience and work effort in professional football players, given the unique stressors and demands associated with their high-performance careers. Results indicated a significant improvement in both resilience and work effort scores following the completion of the MAC group counseling. The findings suggest that the tailored intervention positively influenced participants' ability to bounce back from adversity and exert sustained effort towards their professional goals. The observed increase in resilience and work effort scores underscores the potential efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions in fostering mental resilience and optimizing performance outcomes in elite sports settings. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on mental health and performance enhancement strategies for athletes, particularly within the context of professional football. The implications of these findings extend beyond the field of sports psychology, emphasizing the relevance of mindfulness and acceptance-based approaches in promoting well-being and work-related outcomes in high-stakes, high-demand environments.

Keywords: Resilience, Work Effort, Professional Football Player, Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment Approach, Group Counseling

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Introduction

Sports Psychology has emerged as a crucial component in understanding and enhancing athletic performance in competitive sports. Anderson et al. (2014) considered its significance, highlighting its role as a cornerstone in achieving success in sports. Within this multifaceted field, researchers have delved into various psychological characteristics deemed essential for athletes striving for excellence. Among these characteristics, resilience and work effort have garnered significant attention. Beauchamp et al. (2021) emphasized the paramount importance of resilience and work effort in professional athletes. These psychological traits serve as indispensable tools, enabling athletes to navigate the formidable challenges and pressures inherent in competitive sports. In the face of adversity, resilience empowers athletes to adapt, thrive, and bounce back quickly after adversities or difficult times (Yun-Ci Ye et al., 2022), while unwavering work effort fosters sustained dedication and perseverance towards their goals (Elangovan, 2010). Moreover, the integration of mindfulness practices has been applied to sports psychology, offering a holistic approach to optimizing athletic performance. Gardner and Moore (2012) introduced mindfulness as a pivotal concept in enhancing peak performance and achieving success in competitive sports. By cultivating present-moment awareness and mental clarity, mindfulness equips athletes with the cognitive tools necessary to excel under pressure, maintain focus, and regulate emotions during the intensity of competition. Furthermore, building upon the foundation of mindfulness, Moore (2009) introduced the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) approach as a specialized intervention tailored to the unique demands of competitive sports. This innovative methodology emphasizes acceptance of thoughts and emotions, coupled with a commitment to personal-valued actions, thereby empowering athletes to harness their mental faculties effectively in pursuit of peak performance (Beauchamp et al., 2021). In addition to individualized interventions, group counseling has emerged as a potent adjunct in sports psychology. Group counseling sessions provide athletes with a supportive environment for collective exploration, mutual learning, and shared coping strategies. Through these collaborative endeavors, athletes can enhance their resilience and work effort by drawing inspiration from peers, receiving constructive feedback, and fostering a sense of solidarity. In light of these seminal contributions, this paper aims to delve deeper into the intricate interplay between psychological factors such as resilience, work effort, and mindfulness, and their profound impact on sports performance (Josefsson et al., 2019). By elucidating the underlying mechanisms and practical implications of these psychological constructs, this research endeavors to provide valuable insights into the holistic development of athletes and the optimization of their competitive prowess. The research question is the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment group counseling affects resilience and work effort among professional football players. The objective of the research is to investigate the effect of Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment group counseling on enhancing resilience and work effort among professional football players.

Method

Participants

The population was 60 professional football players in Chainat province, Thailand. The sample consisted of 30 players of professional football players in Chainat province, divided into 15 professional football players in an experimental group and 15 professional football players in a control group. And 15 professional football players of an experimental group

were willing to participate in the 10 sessions of the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) group counseling.

Instrumentation

Scales

The Resilience Scale

The resilience of the participants was measured using the Connor-Davidson Resilience scale (CD-RISC) (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007). The resilience scale of Connor & Davidson (2003) was revised to be the original 25-item scale. The scale is rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1-4), Responses on the scale were the participants with higher scores reflecting greater resilience level of the participants (Gucciardi et al., 2011).

The Work Effort Scale

The measurement of Work Effort was conducted by improving the Work Effort Scale from the framework proposed by De Cooman et al. (2009), comprising a 9-item scale. Responses on the scale were the participants with higher scores reflected greater Work Effort level of the participants.

Intervention

Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) Group Counseling

The Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) was developed from the original of Gardner and Moore (2007) to be 10 sessions of the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) group counseling for 50 minutes per session to improve 3 components leading to enhance Resilience and Work Effort of professional football players i.e. 1) Mindfulness 2) Acceptance and 3) Commitment. The Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) was driven by a flexible 7-module protocol.

The outline of the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) includes;

- 1) Psycho-education
- 2) Mindfulness and Cognitive Defusion
- 3) Value and Value-driven Behavior
- 4) Acceptance
- 5) Commitment
- 6) Skill Consolidation and Poise-Combining Mindfulness, Acceptance, and Commitment
- 7) Maintaining and Enhancing Mindfulness, Acceptance, and Commitment

Procedures

This study was a quantitative quasi-experimental research design with the control group and the experimental group to investigate the effect of Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment group counseling. The granted ethical has been approved for research conducted in humans, number **SWUEC672067**. The researcher contacted the Chainat Hornbill Football Club's manager to initiate the study. After the approval, the Chainat Hornbill Football Club's staff assisted in collecting the Resilience Scale and Work Effort Scale data from 30 professional football players for pre-test measure. All professional football players have been divided into 15 professional football players for an experimental group and 15 professional football players for a control group. The appointment of the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment

(MAC) group counseling within 10 sessions was made for the experimental group members to enhance Resilience and Work Effort. In the end, the 30 professional football players from the experimental group and the control group were conducted for post-test measure of Resilience and Work Effort after the session had ended.

Results

The study aimed to investigate the effects of a Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) group counseling intervention on resilience and work effort among professional football players, comparing an experimental group ($n=15$) with a control group ($n=15$).

Table 1. Participant Demographics and Positions in Experimental and Control Groups ($n = 30$)

Demographic	Group	
	Experimental ($n=15$)	Control ($n=15$)
Age (years)		
19 - 24	13	8
25 - 29	2	2
30 - 35	-	4
36 - 41	-	1
<i>Mean±SD</i>	21.87±2.13	26.13±6.06
Position		
Goalkeeper	1	3
Defender	6	4
Midfielder	6	4
Forward	2	4

Demographic Characteristics: The experimental group predominantly consisted of participants aged 19-24 years, with 13 individuals falling within this age range. Conversely, the control group displayed a broader age distribution, encompassing participants across all age categories. The mean age of the experimental group was 21.87 years ($SD=2.13$), while the control group had a mean age of 26.13 years ($SD=6.06$).

Positional distribution: In both the experimental and control groups, midfielders and defenders constituted the majority of players. Specifically, 6 participants in each group assumed midfield positions, and 6 participants in each group played as defenders. The goalkeeper position was occupied by 1 participant in the experimental group and 3 participants in the control group, 2 participant in the experimental group and 4 participants in the control group were positioned as forwards.

Table 2. Comparison of Resilience and Work Effort Scores Before and After Intervention in Experimental and Control Groups

	Group		<i>D</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p-value</i>
	Experimental (<i>n</i> =15)	Control (<i>n</i> =15)			
Resilience					
Pre-test	71.40±3.29	72.33±2.58	-0.93	.86	.395
Post-test	78.8±2.93	73.13±2.32	5.67	5.86	.000*
Work Effort					
Pre-test	25.86±1.30	26.66±.89	-0.8	1.94	.060
Post-test	28.6±1.12	26.86±1.06	1.74	4.35	.000*

* $p < .05$

Resilience

Prior to the intervention, there were no significant differences in resilience scores between the experimental group ($M = 71.40$, $SD = 3.29$) and the control group ($M = 72.3$, $SD = 2.58$), with a non-significant t-value ($t = .86$, $p = .395$). However, following the intervention, a notable change was observed. The experimental group exhibited a significant increase in resilience scores ($M = 78.8$, $SD = 2.93$), while the control group's scores remained relatively stable ($M = 73.13$, $SD = 2.32$). The difference in post-test resilience scores between the two groups was statistically significant ($t = 5.86$, $p = .000^*$), indicating that the MAC group counseling intervention had a significant impact on enhancing resilience among professional football players compared to the control group.

Work Effort

Before the intervention, there were no significant differences in work effort scores between the experimental ($M = 25.86$, $SD = 1.30$) and control groups ($M = 26.66$, $SD = .89$), as indicated by a non-significant t-value ($t = 1.94$, $p = .060$). However, post-intervention, both groups exhibited significant changes in work effort scores. The experimental group demonstrated a substantial increase ($M = 28.6$, $SD = 1.12$), while the control group showed a modest increase ($M = 26.86$, $SD = 1.06$). The difference in post-test work effort scores between the two groups was statistically significant ($t = 4.35$, $P = .000^*$), indicating a significant improvement in work effort for the experimental group compared to the control group.

Discussion and Conclusion

Sports psychology plays a crucial role in understanding and optimizing athletic performance, particularly in competitive sports settings. Resilience, work effort, and mindfulness are recognized as important psychological factors that contribute to athletes' ability to cope with challenges and attain success (Anderson et al., 2014). In this study, we aimed to investigate the effect of Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) group counseling on resilience among professional football players, building upon the existing literature that underscores the importance of these psychological constructs in sports performance (Gardner and Moore, 2012). Our findings reveal a significant difference in post-test scores for resilience between the experimental and control groups. Participants who participated in MAC group counseling

exhibited notably higher levels of resilience compared to those who did not receive the intervention. This aligns with previous research highlighting the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions in enhancing psychological well-being and performance outcomes in various domains, including sports (Gardner & Moore, 2012; Moore, 2009). The observed increase in resilience among participants in the experimental group can be attributed to the unique components of the MAC approach, which emphasizes mindfulness, acceptance, and commitment to valued actions. By fostering present-moment awareness, acceptance of thoughts and emotions, and alignment with personal values, MAC group counseling equips athletes with the cognitive and emotional tools necessary to navigate adversity, manage stress, and maintain focus on the demands of competitive sports (Josefsson et al., 2019). These findings underscore the practical implications of integrating mindfulness-based interventions, such as MAC group counseling, into athlete development programs. By targeting psychological factors such as resilience, MAC interventions offer a holistic approach to optimizing sports performance and promoting athletes' overall well-being. Furthermore, the effectiveness of MAC group counseling in enhancing resilience among professional football players highlights its potential applicability across diverse athletic populations and contexts. However, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations of the present study. Firstly, the sample size and specific characteristics of the participants may limit the generalization of the findings to broader athlete populations. Additionally, the study design employed a post-test-only control group design, which precludes the establishment of causality. Future research could benefit from longitudinal designs and larger sample sizes to further elucidate the long-term effects of MAC interventions on resilience and other performance-related outcomes in sports. In conclusion, our study contributes to the growing body of literature on sports psychology by demonstrating the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions, such as MAC group counseling, in enhancing resilience among professional football players. By addressing the psychological needs of athletes and equipping them with strategies to thrive in the face of adversity, MAC interventions hold promise for optimizing sports performance and promoting athletes' overall well-being in competitive sports settings. For future research, longitudinal studies should be conducted to assess the sustained effects of MAC group counseling on resilience and performance outcomes among professional football players. Additionally, exploring the applicability and effectiveness of MAC interventions across diverse athlete populations and sports contexts could provide valuable insights. Comparative studies comparing MAC interventions with other psychological approaches would help elucidate their unique contributions to resilience and performance. Investigating the psychological mechanisms underlying the effects of MAC interventions on athletes through qualitative or process-oriented research designs are essential.

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