YOUTH ATHLETE GUIDANCE

THE EFFECT OF A GUIDANCE PROGRAM ON IMPROVING PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTROL FOR SHORT-DISTANCE YOUTH ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT:

The research aims to develop a psychological counseling program to enhance the psychological control of young short-track players and evaluate its impact on their development. The researcher hypothesizes that there will be statistically significant differences in the level of psychological control between the control and experimental groups. The experimental method was adopted, involving both control and experimental groups, as it is considered the most appropriate for addressing research problems scientifically. The sample was purposefully selected and consisted of 59 players from first-class clubs in short- and medium-distance running events. A total of 10 players, aged 16-18 years, were randomly divided into two groups: the experimental group (5 players) and the control group (5 players). The scale developed by Al-Qaisi (2019) was used, after modifications to suit the sample, and validated by specialists in educational and psychological sciences and sports psychology. The scale, comprising 46 statements across 4 areas, was found valid with an 80% agreement rate among experts. A pre-test was conducted to measure psychological control levels, and the guidance program was applied using lecture and discussion methods in group counseling sessions for the experimental group. The results showed that the guidance program significantly improved the psychological control of young short-track players, with statistically significant differences favoring the experimental group compared to the control group. The study also highlighted the importance of guidance programs alongside training curricula.

Keywords: *Guidance Program, Psychological Control*

INTRODUCTION AND IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH:

With the development of psychology and its applications, psychological counseling in sports has evolved as a scientific field and professional practice with a distinct identity on both theoretical and practical levels. It has become one of the key pillars of psychological preparation, where the coach takes on the role of an educator, guide, and counselor to help athletes achieve optimal psychological stability and, consequently, better performance **(1).**

Sports psychology investigates psychological topics related to sports activities across different fields and levels. It also examines the personality traits that form the foundation for athletic engagement, aiming to develop this type of human activity and find scientific solutions to its practical challenges. Sports psychology seeks to understand individual behavior and experiences influenced by sports activities, measure these behaviors and experiences as accurately as possible, and apply the acquired knowledge in practical contexts **(2).**

The challenges athletes face during training and competition, including physiological and psychological changes, highlight their need for special care throughout their training periods.

Psychological counseling is a highly valuable and significant process, viewed as a human experience in a rapidly changing world where human relationships have noticeably weakened. It emphasizes collaboration among individuals to achieve shared goals and provides opportunities to express hopes, aspirations, and fears, allowing individuals to share their concerns and interests. Counseling contributes to fostering a sense of humanity among individuals and helps them solve problems, recognize their capabilities, and make the best use of them for personal and societal benefit.

Psychological control is one of the key skills that directly impact athletes' performance levels. It is a trait among various characteristics that collectively shape an athlete's personality and is considered a value contributing to the athlete's overall character development.

The importance of guidance programs lies in achieving constructive goals that benefit both the individual and the community. These programs provide essential services, especially for track and field athletes, who may face difficult times and experience psychological and social problems. Guidance programs help them develop their personalities effectively, positively influencing their behavior and performance.

In this research, the preparation of guidance programs aims to enhance psychological control by promoting better psychological development and mental health, preparing athletes to face challenging situations.

Research Problem:

Track and field is one of the most historically significant sports, showcasing incredible world records, particularly in short-distance running events. These achievements demonstrate the scientific advancements derived from continuous experimental research aimed at breaking records.

Psychological counseling plays a crucial role in helping athletes set realistic goals that align with their abilities and potentials. It aids them in understanding themselves better by evaluating their strengths and weaknesses and utilizing their capabilities to the fullest extent.

Psychological control is one of the essential aspects of psychological counseling, significantly influencing athletic performance.

According to the researcher's knowledge, most studies addressing the psychological aspects influencing athletic performance have covered various topics but have rarely explored the issue of psychological control among athletes.

Therefore, the researcher sought to address this gap by developing a guidance program to enhance psychological control, as the Iraqi literature lacks studies on these variables within guidance programs, particularly for short-distance runners. The aim is to assess the effectiveness of the program and its impact on athletes' psychological control levels.

Research Objectives:

Develop a psychological guidance program to enhance psychological control for short-distance youth runners.

Identify the impact of the guidance program on the development of psychological control among short-distance youth runners.

Research Hypotheses:

There are no statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups in the psychological control levels of short-distance youth runners.

Research Fields:

Spatial Field: The sports field at the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, University of Baghdad, Al-Jadriya.

Human Field: First-division club athletes in short-distance running for youth.

Time Field: From January 15, 2024, to April 15, 2024.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FIELD PROCEDURES:

Research Method:

Given the nature of the problem, the researcher adopted the experimental method with pre- and post-testing, as it is the most appropriate method for solving problems scientifically.

Research Sample:

The sample was intentionally selected and included all first-division club youth athletes in short- and medium-distance running events. The original research population consisted of 59 athletes. The final research sample included ten players who were available and committed during the experiment period. The sample was randomly divided by lottery into an experimental group (5 players) and a control group (5 players). The sample was considered homogeneous since all members were first-division club youth athletes aged between 16 and 18 years.

Instruments and Tools Used in the Research:

Arabic and foreign sources

Psychological control scale

Psychological Control Scale:

After reviewing the scales developed in this field, the researcher chose the **Al-Qaisi Scale (2019)**, specifically designed for the Iraqi environment. It is the most recent and was based on **Rotter's Theory**.

Since the scale was initially developed to measure psychological control for football players, the researcher modified its statements to suit the study sample. After these modifications, the scale

was presented to experts in educational, psychological, and sports psychology sciences to evaluate its suitability for the intended purpose.

The analysis of expert responses indicated an 80% agreement on the validity of the scale and suggested minor adjustments to some statements. The scale consists of **46 statements** divided into **four domains**. Table 1 below shows the distribution of statements across these domains.

Table (1): Distribution of Statements for the Psychological Control Scale Domains

No.	Domain	Total
1	Psychological Stability	13
2	Emotional Regulation	10
3	Self-Control	11
4	Emotion Awareness	12
Total		**46**

Preliminary Experiment:

After verifying the face validity of the scale, a preliminary experiment was conducted on a sample of **4 randomly selected players**. The purposes of this experiment were as follows:

Verify the clarity of the scale instructions.
Assess the clarity of the scale items for the players and their response levels.

Identify potential obstacles and challenges for the researcher.
Measure the response time for players to complete the scale, which ranged between **12 to 15 minutes**.

Given that the scale is modern, standardized, and tailored to the Iraqi environment, the researcher chose to rely on its existing scientific foundations.

Scientific Properties of the Psychological Control Scale:

Validity:

Face Validity:

This type of validity was verified by consulting experts and specialists, who agreed on the validity of all scale items with an **85% agreement rate.**

Reliability:

Test-Retest Method:

The scale's reliability was assessed through the test-retest method, which assumes that a tool is reliable if it yields consistent results across repeated measurements. The scale was applied to a sample of **4 players** on **Monday, January 15, 2024**. The same sample was retested **14 days later, on Monday, January 29, 2024**. Using Pearson's correlation coefficient, the psychological control domain achieved a reliability coefficient of **0.88**, indicating high reliability.

Cronbach's Alpha:

This method assesses the consistency of responses across scale items. When applied to the psychological control scale, Cronbach's alpha value was **0.885** at a **0.05 significance level**, indicating a statistically significant and high reliability, making the scale ready for application.

Guidance Program for Developing Psychological Control:

The guidance program was the primary objective of this research. To achieve this, the researcher relied on a structured planning system based on the following steps:

Identifying Needs:

The researcher identified the essential topics for the guidance sessions by reviewing literature and previous studies. These topics were presented to experts in psychology, educational guidance, and sports psychology for discussion.

Setting Priorities:

After collecting and analyzing expert responses, the guidance session topics were ranked in descending order based on their frequency. Expert comments on session titles, duration, and timing were also considered.

Defining Objectives:

The program aimed to develop psychological control and achievement motivation among players by changing their self-perceptions, making them aware of their capabilities, and encouraging them to set realistic goals, reduce anxiety, and foster a positive self-image to achieve better athletic performance.

Designing Activities:

The program activities were designed based on its objectives and available resources.

Although it was initially planned to include educational films, the lack of resources due to the country's circumstances led to the use of role-playing scenes and lectures delivered by experts.

Program Evaluation:

Before implementing the program, it was presented to experts in general and sports psychology to evaluate its suitability. Following their suggestions, the final version was developed with an **88% expert agreement** on its content.

MAIN EXPERIMENT:

Pre-Test Application:

After selecting the research sample, comprising experimental and control groups, a pre-test was conducted to measure psychological control during the national athletics championship on **Monday, February 6, 2024**.

Guidance Program Implementation:

The program was implemented using lectures and group discussions with the experimental group. The group approach reduced individual egocentrism and fostered a supportive environment of mutual respect and trust. Players were encouraged to participate in discussions, particularly those with initially low engagement.

Duration: 40 days

Session Frequency: Two sessions per week

***Session Duration*:** 40 to 45 minutes

***Total Sessions*:** 12 sessions (from February 12, 2024, to March 27, 2024)

Timing: Afternoon before training, from 4:30 to 5:15 PM

Expert Involvement: Specialists in general and sports psychology were invited to deliver lectures.

Post-Test Application:

The post-test was conducted on **March 3, 2024**, under the same conditions as the pre-test, with the assistance of a research team comprising multiple assistants.

Statistical Methods:

Data were analyzed using **SPSS (version 12)** statistical software.

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS:

Analysis and Discussion of Variance Between Control and Experimental Groups:

Analysis and Discussion of Psychological Control Test Results for the Control Group:

Table (2) shows the mean values, standard deviations, and computed and tabulated t-values for the pre- and post-tests of psychological control among short-distance runners in the control group.

Sample	Variables	Pre-test Mean (S)	SD (σ)	Post-test Mean (S)	SD (σ)	Calculated t-value	Tabulated t-value	Significance
Control	Psychological Control	91.75	1.708	76.00	24.36	1.66	3.18	Not Significant
Experimental	Psychological Control	91.70	1.42	116.75	4.36	7.860	3.182	Significant

Significance Level (0.05) and Degrees of Freedom (8)

Based on Table (2)

The table illustrates the mean values, standard deviations, and t-values (calculated and tabulated) for the pre- and post-tests of psychological control for the experimental group of short-distance runners:

Pre-test Mean (Experimental Group): 91.70 with a standard deviation of 1.42
Post-test Mean: 116.75 with a standard deviation of 4.36
Calculated t-value: 7.860, which is greater than the tabulated value of **3.182**, indicating a statistically significant difference.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS:

Based on **Tables (1) and (2)**, there are significant differences between the pre- and post-tests for the experimental group, favoring the post-test. This demonstrates the importance of the counseling program applied by the researcher to the research sample in enhancing the players' psychological control.

This result can be attributed to the new information and ideas presented by the counselor through the counseling program, which helped the participants reorganize their perceptions and thoughts, overcome the causes of their problems, and reach self-insight, self-awareness, and self-acceptance **(2 ad 3).**

The researcher attributes the non-significant differences in the control group to the absence of participation in the counseling program, which maintained deficiencies in the players' psychological control. Psychological control is a critical factor in developing certain personality traits in athletes. A disciplined player can achieve goals easily, views themselves positively, and demonstrates high ambition in achieving objectives. Such a player exerts more effort and perseverance, positively boosting their self-confidence. Conversely, a player lacking discipline tends to be hesitant and fearful, negatively affecting their performance **(1)**

CONCLUSIONS:

Based on the results obtained, the following conclusions were drawn:

The counseling program had a clear impact on developing the psychological control of Young short-distance runners.

There were statistically significant differences favoring the experimental group that participated in the counseling program compared to the control group that did not.

Random differences appeared in the control group, which did not participate in the counseling program.

The study highlighted the importance of counseling programs alongside training curricula.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1-The necessity of involving psychological specialists and social counselors in sports Teams and activating counseling and educational programs.

2-Educational instructors and counselors in universities can benefit from the counseling program prepared by the researcher to develop emotional control and self-achievement motivation among athletes.

3-Encouraging the use of diverse counseling methods by trainers and educational counselors during counseling sessions for sports teams.

4-Conducting research on educational and psychological counseling and linking it to other variables such as psychological pressures and disorders.

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Appendix (1) : The Psychological Control Scale is shown.

No.	Paragraph	Always Applies to Me	Often Applies to Me	Sometimes Applies to Me	Rarely Applies to Me	Never Applies to Me
1	I feel satisfied with the level I have reached in sports.					
2	I feel I perform better in training than in competition.					
3	I regret some behaviors and jokes with my teammates.					
4	Nothing can distract me from my interest in sports.					
5	I enjoy training, and rarely feel tired.					
6	Negative emotions take over when I experience failure.					
7	I feel confident and in control in critical situations.					
8	I avoid situations that cause me anger and emotional outbursts.					

No.	Paragraph	Always Applies to Me	Often Applies to Me	Sometimes Applies to Me	Rarely Applies to Me	Never Applies to Me
9	I fail to concentrate on one issue and gather my thoughts about it.					
10	I suffer from headaches when I am unable to focus on something specific.					
11	My strong personality and level of thinking have made me a successful and distinguished person.					
12	No one can deter me from my determination.					
13	I feel inner peace and reassurance most of the time.					
14	My behavior often precedes my thoughts in many situations.					
15	Experience in the field has made me better at handling and					

No.	Paragraph	Always Applies to Me	Often Applies to Me	Sometimes Applies to Me	Rarely Applies to Me	Never Applies to Me
	controlling my emotions in critical situations.					
16	My willpower and determination help me rise again whenever I face setbacks.					
17	I have a sixth sense that helps me interpret situations intelligently and brilliantly.					
18	I feel unprepared for the race.					
19	My self-awareness and self-esteem help me handle critical situations.					
20	I have the ability to make the right decision even if I feel in a difficult situation.					
21	I can easily understand the emotions of others.					

No.	Paragraph	Always Applies to Me	Often Applies to Me	Sometimes Applies to Me	Rarely Applies to Me	Never Applies to Me
22	I have abnormal responses when exposed to psychological stress.					
23	I feel weak in accurately assessing the emotions of others.					
24	I reward myself for any good deed I do.					
25	I have the ability to recognize and manage different emotions appropriately.					
26	I think of ways to enhance control over my emotions.					
27	I feel anxious about the possibility of injury during the race.					
28	My heart rate increases before a competition.					
29	I find it difficult to express my feelings.					

No.	Paragraph	Always Applies to Me	Often Applies to Me	Sometimes Applies to Me	Rarely Applies to Me	Never Applies to Me
30	I don’t like others to know how I feel.					
31	My feelings help me understand what happened.					
32	I believe that a failure is someone who cannot seize any opportunity for self-improvement.					
33	My ability to focus differs between training and competition.					
34	I experience physiological symptoms like increased heart rate and body temperature when I am emotionally aroused.					
35	I feel satisfied with myself after every accomplishment I achieve.					

No.	Paragraph	Always Applies to Me	Often Applies to Me	Sometimes Applies to Me	Rarely Applies to Me	Never Applies to Me
36	My physical abilities increase as my mental abilities grow.					
37	Mental preparation is very important for athletes to control their emotions before, during, and after the race.					
38	I feel optimistic when I think about the future.					
39	No one can deter me from my determination to win.					
40	I lose control of my emotions as the race becomes more challenging.					
41	I deal rationally with negative situations.					
42	I feel balanced and responsible when participating in a competition.					

No.	Paragraph	Always Applies to Me	Often Applies to Me	Sometimes Applies to Me	Rarely Applies to Me	Never Applies to Me
43	Poor behavior from some teammates makes me lose control of my emotions, which may lead to clashes with them.					
44	I resort to violent behavior if necessary.					
45	I feel arrogant after accomplishing any good performance.					
46	I feel satisfied with myself after any valuable task I perform.					