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The Relationship between Sports Participation, Psychology and Self Esteem among Malaysian Para Athletes

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Abstract

Introduction: Self-esteem is the comprehension a person makes of worth, in view of feelings and convictions about someone's fits into or performs in any given setting in life. Self-esteem is a term utilized as a part of brain research to reflect an individual's general passionate assessment of someone's particular worth. Individuals with physical disabilities generally have a more negative physical self-concept than other people, but people with physical disability involved in regular sports practice can report higher levels of physical self than sedentary individuals without a disability

Objectives: The main purpose of the present study was to determine the self-esteem level among national para-athletes in sport participation and to identify if there is any relationship among them in sport participation. **Methods**: A total of 100 persons with disability (56 males and 44 females) aged between 11 and 60 years old was been selected for this study. They are para-athletes representing Malaysia who are been institutionalized at Pusat Kecemerlangan Sukan Paralimpik, Kampung Pandan, Kuala Lumpur. They completed the Trait Sports Confidence Inventory (TSCI) questionnaire that has consistently been used to measure self-esteem among athletes. The study also uses BUCS Disability Sport Questionnaire. This questionnaire was used to measure participation in sport. Sports participation was related to all indices of self-esteem and this was equally true for male and female para-athletes.

Results The findings reveal that 29.5% of female para-athletes have high self-esteem compared to 23.2% of male para-athletes. Besides, the finding that high confidence among female para-athletes appears to have generally more all-around expounded learning of self-pertinent others fits well with various late examinations showing that females are more worried than males with building up a cozy relationship and furthermore better at doing as such. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between gender and level of self-esteem among the para-athletes in sports participation. The relations were non-significant, X^2 (2, N=100) = 1.25, p=0.535).

Conclusions: This situation occurs because this study involved respondents with disability. Their ability of thinking is not the same as able-bodied athletes. It is shown that para-athletes are more relaxed compared with able-bodied athletes before a competition. It has been recommended, that it is essential to increase participation in sports because such participation can empower para-athletes to set and attain goals and reach a higher self-esteem and quality of life on their own terms.

Keywords: self-esteem, gender, person with disabilities, sport participation

1. Introduction

Self-esteem is the comprehension a person makes of worth, in view of feelings and convictions about someone's fits into or performance in any given setting in life. Self-esteem is a term utilized as a part of brain research to reflect an individual's general passionate assessment of someone's particular worth. It is a figment of oneself and in addition a state of mind toward the self. Self-esteem is otherwise called the evaluated measurement of the self that incorporates sentiments of value, pride, and disheartening. (Bhattacharjee et al. 2014). Basically, self-esteem is seen as a marker of mental well-being, clashing views of its adaptive value can be found in the self-esteem findings and extensive culture based on Jordan et al. (2003). According to Bowker (2006), the self-esteem of some individuals is based on their age. Furthermore, Neiss et al. (2002) say genetics are impacted on self-esteem someone such as environmental, parental and fairly substantial. Bhattacharjee et al. (2014) state that physical appearance, self-perception, and psychological wellness issues will impact the self-esteem of individuals with a disability. Other than that, Trzesniewski et al. (2006) state the diversity between youths with low and high self-esteem is poor mental and physical and additionally more badly monetary prospects. Besides, the concept of self-esteem will make the expanding of well-being conduct, for example, stop to be smoker, weight control, alcohol abuse, and exercise behavior. In addition, the sources of men's self-esteem are from dependence and women's self-esteem is from connection and interdependence also they have a distinction in the meta-analysis (Gentile et al., 2009). Moreover, Seery et al, (2004) say the dependability of self-esteem indicates one such measurement that has demonstrated significant utility with the potential for even more. Lastly, the sex contrast in self-esteem men and women differed fundamentally on fulfillment about weight and physical attraction (Bowker et al., 2003). Thus, the purpose of the study is to identify the level of self-esteem among para-athletes, and also to know if is there any relationship between self-esteem among them.

Disability is defined as a long-standing illness and condition that interferes with daily activities (Lelkes, 2013). Therefore, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) are persons who are experiencing long-standing illnesses and conditions and these specific groups of people are suffering because of their conditions. It is clear that the needs of the PWDs are the same as those of Persons without Disabilities (Rimmer et al., 2004). They do not want to be categorized as "impaired" or "disabled" but they want to see them as people who also have rights and needs like engaging in social activities to recognize their emotional life, autonomy, and aspirations (Colver, 2005). However, the illness and physical limitations that are experienced by the PWDs have an impact on their participation with other people (Campen et al., 2007) and experience practical and social problems (Kvam et al., 2007). They were being isolated also by their parents because of the shame of their physical condition (Kandasamy et al., 2009). Individuals with physical disabilities generally have a more negative physical self-concept than other people, but people with physical disability involved in regular sports practice can report higher levels of physical self than sedentary individuals without disability (Scarpa, 2011). The benefits of physical activity for people with disabilities are well known. The beneficial effects are both physical and psychological, including maintaining a healthy physical condition, preventing diseases, improving body image perception, increasing self-esteem, and growing social relationships (Smith et al., 2017). "Adapted" physical activity, which has its origins in a relatively recent period, provides valid support to promote independent living and social inclusion. In this sense, for people with disabilities, sports represent a form of adapted physical activity that improves general health, when carried out at a recreational level, and also allows for self-evaluation in real competitions, when the sport is carried out at a competitive level (Legg et al., 2011). However, people with disabilities lead a more inactive lifestyle than the rest of the population, as they participate less in sports and physical activity in general (Martin et al., 2016; van den Berg-Emons et al., 2011). The cause of this limited participation should be sought by identifying a series of barriers, represented by the availability of suitable mobility aids, accessibility to facilities, transport limitations, lack of motivation, as well as the availability and competence of support personnel (Annekan et al., 2010). Long periods of inactivity, inaccessibility to properly equipped sports facilities, the cancelation of sports competitions, as well as all the limits imposed on the practice of competitive and non-competitive sports, for example during COVID-19 pandemic could be responsible for a negative impact on the general health and athletic performance of disables athletes (Fari et al., 2023).

Self-esteem is to describe how we view ourselves either in daily activities or sports activities. Generally, a

person with disabilities is they have a mental and physical weakness that generously restrains at least one noteworthy life exercise. Based on the topic, the statement of the problem in this study is the lack of physical ability in sports performance. Physical appearance, self-perception, and psychological wellness issues will impact the self-esteem of individuals with a disability (Bhattacharje et al., 2014). Other than that, negative thinking comes during sports performance is one of the issues highlighted in the current study among persons with disability who are participating in sports. Last but not least, age factors also influence persons with disability in sports performance (Neiss et al., 2002). it is important to define self-esteem from its general term self-concept or the totality of the perception of people about themselves but the difference of self-esteem to self-concept is that self-esteem is emotional in response to evaluating different things about the self (Heatherton et al., 2003). Though personal contacts promote self-esteem (Denissen et al., 2008), other people with low self-esteem enhance their physical appearance to achieve a high level of self-esteem and acceptance (Park et al., 2009). Having a perfect body image is rewarding in the sense that a person will receive either acceptance and/or appraisal from other people. However, giving too much importance to physical appearance in developing self-esteem may bring negative consequences. For example, muscularity and body fat give pressure on men which affects their attitudes toward their bodies (Grammas et al., 2009) and body dissatisfaction in women leads to perfectionism that predicts bulimic symptoms (Vohs et al., 2001).

Self-esteem is a belief in oneself that expresses the attitude of capability, significance, success, and worth (Khan et al., 2014). It sees global self-worth by looking at the positive and negative feelings about the self (Park et al., 2009). Self-esteem is both social and psychological (Reasoner, 2004) and it is important to define self-esteem from its general term self-concept or the totality of the perception of people about themselves but the difference between self-esteem to self-concept is that self-esteem is emotional in response to evaluating different things about the self (Heatherton et al., 2003). In sex differences, there is a study that women show lower self-esteem than men but the curve level of self-esteem meets in old age (Orth et al., 2010). But the latest study describes that there are no gender differences in terms of self-esteem (Erol et al., 2011). Based on the different literature of the same researchers, there is still a vague difference in the level of self-esteem between men and women, particularly among PWDs. Maintaining body image in both males and female gives pressure on both sexes in achieving perfect body image (Grammas et al., 2009) which is also associated with self-esteem (Park et al., 2009). But what if there is nothing to be looked perfect in body image? Having imperfections in physical attributes like PWDs which are perfectly imperfect? How do they look towards themselves? Therefore, the failure of the people around PWDs in recognizing their needs may have a big impact on developing healthy general self-esteem (Miyahara et al., 2006) mostly in women with disabilities who are experiencing not just disability but also gender biases (Nosek et al., 2003). Different studies argue that it may end up in a negative relationship between physical disability and self-esteem wherein lower self-esteem is expressed (Miyahara et al., 2006). Due to PWDs condition, they are also experiencing bullying more often than persons without disabilities (Rose et al., 2011; Sentenac et al., 2011). PWDs are being bullied by name-calling, teasing, physical attacks, harsh verbal bullying, verbal aggression, and threats, taking belongings, imitating their disability, and making fun of them (Carter et al., 2006). PWDs are also maltreated (Moore et al., 2011) by almost 4 times more than their peers without disabilities (Sullivan et al., 2000) and are abused not just physically but also sexually among PWD women (Plummer et al., 2012).

Because of these negative experiences by the PWDs, negative effects are manifested (Crothers et al., 2008). PWDs are dropping out and the worst, they are not enrolling in school (Kandasamy et al., 2009). Because of these situations, PWDs often more experience stress which has a direct impact on their family (Gupta et al., 2004). They are also experiencing anxiety (Kvam, et al., 2007) and even depression (Kandasamy et al., 2009; Kvam et al., 2007) wherein these experiences made them feel very dissatisfied in life (Lelkes, 2013) and very unhappy (Lelkes, 2013; Kandasamy et al., 2009). They also look to themselves as a burden to the people around them especially to their family when the members are showing hatred towards them (Kandasamy et al., 2009).

On the other hand, there is existing literature that looks at the positive sides among PWDs wherein social activities promote psychological well-being to the PWDs. Giving importance to their environment promotes quality of life among PWDs (Yazicoglu et al., 2012; Lundberg et al., 2011; Colver, 2005). The participation in which the PWDs are involved together with their family and the environment will help them to become goal-

oriented, family-centered, cooperative, strength-based, ecological, and self-determined (Palisano et al., 2011). It also promotes subjective well-being especially if they perceive that their participation in different social activities is valuable (Campen et al., 2007). Their interactions with their co-PWDs also made them happy and cooperative (Kandasamy et al., 2009). Based on the literature cited, there are also ways to promote well-being among PWDs, and engaging in social activities is one factor to be looked into.

2. Objectives

The main purpose of the present study was to determine the self-esteem level among national para-athletes in sport participation and to identify if there is any relationship among them in sport participation.

3. Methods

The non-experimental causal-comparative design has been applied in the study. This design is selected because involving the collection of numerical data that are usually obtained through direct testing, questionnaire, or a multitude of paper and paper instruments. This current study design was to study samples that represent the populations and investigate the relationship between two variables that are the independent variable (self-esteem) among para-athletes and the dependent variable sport participation.

A total of 100 persons with disabilities (56 males and 44 females) aged between 11 to 60 years old was been selected for this study. They are para-athletes representing Malaysia who are been institutionalized at Pusat Kecemerlangan Sukan Paralimpik, Kampung Pandan, Kuala Lumpur, a superb sports training facility and accommodation where they stay and train together when they have any international competitions. The respondents must have physical impairments such as blind and visual impairment, deaf and hearing impairment, spinal cord, amputee, intellectual disability, and dwarfism. The respondent is from various races such as Malay, Chinese, Indian, and others. There are some types of sports involved for the respondents such as para swimming, wheelchair basketball, sitting volleyball, wheelchair tennis, para cycling, CP soccer, para-archery, wheelchair fencing, lawn bowl, para tenpin bowling, para-badminton, para table tennis, para-athletics, and para kayaking. The study uses a purposive sampling technique. The study uses Trait Sports Confidence Inventory (TSCI) questionnaire that has consistently been used to measure self-esteem among athletes. The study also uses BUCS Disability Sport Questionnaire (February 2014). This questionnaire was used to measure participation in sports. The questionnaire has three parts (part A, part B, and part C). Part Auses demographic structure such as the detail of the respondent, type of disability, and type of sport that the respondent participates. Part B consists of 6 questions that measure the involvement of para-athletes in sports. Part C consists of the information related to the feeling of a para-athlete's participation in sport. There have 14 questions and it has been rating it using the Likert scale range from 1 for hardly ever, 2 for sometimes, and 3 for often.

Data Collection Procedure

The data of the para-athletes have been collected during the national training camp. Participation in the survey was voluntary with confidentiality of information assured and would be used for research purposes only. Respondents in this study were briefed on the purpose of the study and informed consent was obtained prior to commencing the survey. Assurance was given to the respondents that they would not be exposed to any kind of harm, physical or psychological as well as social or economic. A face-to-face interview was conducted with the visually impaired respondents, sign language was conducted with the hearing-impaired respondents and a self-administered questionnaire was administered to the physically disabled respondents. Collecting data is one of the crucial parts of the investigation. Respondents will be given about an hour to answer the questionnaire. Once they have answered the questionnaire, the assistant will make sure that the respondents answered all the items well before collecting them. The study has been granted ethical approval from the faculty ethical committee with the reference number (600-FSR (PT.5/1).

IBM SPSS version 25.0 had been used to measure the research objectives. Descriptive statistics analyze the frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation of demographic data and self-esteem level in terms of age among persons with disability in sport participation. The chi-square test was used to measure the relationship

between the levels of self-esteem among para-athletes in sport participation.

3. Results

Table 1 showed that the number of persons with disabilities between gender was 56.0% (N=56) for males and 44.0% (N=44) for female respondents. The majority of respondent for this study was Malay (52.0%, n=52), followed by Chinese (27.0%, n=27), Indian (19.0%, n=19), and others (2.0%, n=2). Most of the respondents were aged 20- to 29-year-old (50%, n=50), followed by ages 11 to 19-year-old (24%, n=24), age 30-39 (17%, n=17), and age 40 to 49 (9%, n=9). Most of them are single (73%, n=73). Respondents participate in the study mostly among people with a disability spinal cord (21%, n=21), amputees (20%, n=20), deaf and hearing impairment (16%, n=16), blind and visual impairment (15%, n=15) and intellectual disorder (15%, n=15). Table 1 also reveals the sports that been involved by the respondents such as para swimming (15%), wheelchair fencing (7%), wheelchair basketball (8%), sitting volleyball (3%), and wheelchair tennis (5.0%), lawn bowl and para tenpin bowling (3%) and para badminton (17%). Para archery (6%) and para kayak (2%), CP soccer (6%), and the biggest number of sports involved by the athletes in the current study are para-athletics (18%). All of the respondents are para-athletes who have vast experiences in their respective sports such as 6 to 10 years of experience or involvement (49.0%), 1 to 5 years of experience or involvement in sports (23.0%), 11 to 15 years of experience or involvement in sports (22.0%) and finally 16 to 20 years of experience or involvement in sports (6.0%).

Table 1 Demographic data of the Respondent

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	56	56.0
	Female	44	44.0
Race	Malay	52	52.0
	Chinese	27	27.0
	Indian	19	19.0
	Others	2	2.0
Age (years)	11-19	24	24.0
	20-29	50	50.0
	30-39	17	17.0
	40-49	9	91.0
Type of Disability	Blind and visually Impaired	15	15.0
	Deaf and hearing Impaired	16	16.0
	Intellectual Disabilities	15	15.0
	Spinal Cord Injury	21	21.0
	Amputees	20	20.0
	Dwarf	8	8.0
	Others	5	5.0
Type of Sports Involvement	Para-swimming	15	15.0
	Wheelchair fencing	7	7.0
	Wheelchair basketball	8	8.0
	Sitting volleyball	3	3.0
	Wheelchair tennis	5	5.0
	Para Lawn bowl	3	3.0

Para tenpin bowling	3	3.0
Para badminton	17	17.0
Para archery	6	6.0
Para kayak	2	2.0
Para athletics	18	18.0
Para table tennis	7	7.0
CP Soccer	6	6.0

Table 2 Classification of the Level of Self-esteem among Para Athletes during Participation in Sport between gender.

	Level of Self-Esteem			Total
Gender	Low	Medium	High	
Male	21 (37.5%)	22 (39.3%)	13 (23.2%)	56
Female	12 (27.3%)	19 (43.2%)	13 (29.5%)	44
Total	33	41	26	100

Table 2 show the level of self-esteem among the para-athletes based on the three-classification level of self-esteem that are low, medium, and high. The low level of self-esteem score ranges from 23-28. The medium self-esteem score ranges from 29-34. The high level of self-esteem score ranges from 35-40. It has been revealed that 29.5% of female para-athletes possess a higher level of self-esteem compared to male para-athletes (23.2%). Most of the male and female para-athletes reported being in a medium level of self-esteem [male (39.3%, n=22), female (43.2%, n=19)]. Most probably, during participation in sports, female para-athletes are always in stress conditions because they are unable to control the stressful situation when facing competition. The male para-athletes tend to be in a relaxing mode and they can manage themselves during the competition. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between gender and level of self-esteem among para-athletes during participation in sports. The relationship was non-significant, $X2$ (2, N=100) = 1.25, p=0.535).

4. Discussion

The current study's findings show that there was no significant relationship in the level of self-esteem between the male and the female Malaysia para-athletes during participation in sports. Because of the small sample sizes, related to the limited number of Malaysian para-athletes involve in the study, one is not allowed to draw firm conclusions. Furthermore, the groups lack homogeneity in terms of disability. Sherrill (1997) cautions against generalization over types of disability. However, it reflects what occurs in the applied setting, and small sample sizes in each category do not allow us to further subdivide the samples. As such, the nature of this investigation is explorative, but of utmost interest to further understand the personal profiles of athletes with a disability, and to counter the argument raised by Martin et al. (1997) that many 'others' do not consider athletes with disabilities as legitimate or real athletes. The concept that individuals with disabilities do not necessarily perceive their conditions and identities as bad, tragic, or negative is supported by the present findings. This is in line with the findings of Hutzler and Bar-Eli (1993) that sports participation has a beneficial effect on self-esteem, and with Sherrill (1997) who states that disablement is not necessarily the major determinant of self-esteem for individuals with disabilities.

It is known that keeping physically active is beneficial to mental health, improving skills, self-confidence, and self-esteem, and providing social support to para-athletes (Fari et al., 2023). Although there appears to be a definite link between sports participation and physical competencies, the relation between sports participation

and general self-esteem is less clear. Previous research is limited and somewhat inconsistent, only a few of the researchers have distinguished between global self-esteem and domain-specific indices (e.g., perceived physical competence). Some studies have shown that individuals who participate in sports have higher self-esteem than nonparticipants. Jayson and Angelo (2018), found that adolescent females who were involved in sports had higher self-esteem than non-participants. Although individuals with disabilities often report an absence of positive life experiences because of their disadvantaged social position (Tam 1998), our results, among the others, also confirmed that regular participation in physical activity and sports is the ideal tool to increase the level of self-esteem not only in healthy population but also in persons with disabilities. Heydari et al. (2009) showed the difference in the level of self-esteem between persons with disabilities and able students. They found that the level of self-esteem and life satisfaction is lower in persons with disabilities than in able people. Another investigation confirmed the lowest level of self-esteem in the group of sedentary people with disabilities (Nemček 2016d) and the highest level of self-esteem in the group of active healthy participants (Bendíková & Nemček 2016). Nemček (2013) surveyed people with different kinds of disabilities and found no significant differences between genders in the level of self-esteem score, but mean scores declared a higher level of self-esteem in women than men. And this confirms the current study that female para-athletes possess a high level of self-esteem compared to male para-athletes. Differences between active and sedentary people with disabilities show that those, who prefer an active lifestyle and participate in sports (elite and sport for all levels) are more satisfied with their life than those who are not participating in sports at all (Nemček et al., 2014).

Even female persons with disabilities have higher levels of self-esteem than males, but Jayson and Angelo (2018) think otherwise with their findings showing that there is no significant difference between sexes in terms of self-esteem. Thus, the level of the persons with disabilities self-esteem among different sexes is not that far different from each other but the closeness of their scores indicates that they have almost the same level of self-esteem in terms of sexes. One implication is that they have the same perception about themselves, they do not rate themselves to the higher extremes of the score but because they also have a positive attitude toward themselves, they do not also rate themselves to the lower extremes and see that they can also do some things as the persons without disabilities can do (Jayson & Angelo, 2018).

One way of boosting self-esteem is participation in sports (Labudová, Nemček & Kraček 2015; Bendíková & Labudová 2012). There are numerous benefits of sport participation in terms of both physical and psychological well-being (e.g., self-esteem). Self-esteem is an important psychological variable (Bardel, Fontayne, Colombel & Schiphof 2010) and a facet of personality (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis 2008) in competitive sports. Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis (2008) demonstrated that individuals with higher levels of self-esteem tend to perceive competitive sports as challenging, whereas individuals with lower levels of self-esteem regard them as threatening (Nemcek, 2017).

In summary, the present study documents a strong athletic identity in Malaysian athletes with a disability, not primarily oriented towards medals and records. These results support the importance of sports regarding increased awareness and acceptance of athletes with disabilities by themselves and by others (Van der Vliet et al., 2008). As a consequence, families, coaches, association staff, and all related others should be aware that the athletes indicate that they invested a lot in their sport. Martin et al. (1999) mention that, as a consequence, one should acknowledge these athletes and continue to provide them with challenging, competitive opportunities for athletic experience. The results of this study may further our understanding of the psychological benefits of sports participation among para-athletes.

Conclusion

Results of the data analysis of the current study's findings show that there was no significant difference in the level of self-esteem between the male and the female Malaysia para-athletes during participation in sports. It has been recommended, that it is essential to increase participation in sports because such participation can empower para-athletes to set and attain goals and reach a higher self-esteem and quality of life on their own terms. In terms of self-esteem, para-athletes possess an average level of self-esteem, and age has also reported no association with self-esteem. Self-esteem is reported as a strong indicator of happiness in previous studies. But in the current study, self-esteem is reported to have no relationship to the overall well-being of the para-athletes. Though happiness has an association with self-esteem, the difference between the one-dimensional

happiness scale and the multidimensional approach to well-being may affect the association of self-esteem with well-being. Also, the experiences of the para-athletes are also factors to be seen why their level of well-being and self-esteem are not associated. But their acceptance of being "perfectly imperfect" wherein they accept who they are and what they have as physically imperfect individuals are there; they still need more acceptance about their selves and they need to value more their happiness. This will help them in changing negative beliefs about their selves. Given the major findings of the study, para-athletes got moderate scores of overall well-being despite their conditions. This is a good manifestation that they possess a considerable level of well-being despite their conditions.

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