

*Full Length Research*

## **Relationship between Perceived Self-Esteem and Psychological Well-Being among Student Athletes**

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The relationship between perceived self-esteem and psychological well-being was explored among a sample 350 student athletes from Ebonyi State University; Abakaliki, South East, Nigeria. They were randomly selected for participation aged 18-30 years with mean age of 24 years. Using the person correlation and the t-test of significance, results showed that perceived self-esteem and psychological well-being were related and student athletes with high self-esteem have high psychological well being while their counterparts with low self-esteem have low psychological well being. The implications of these findings for sports performance and longevity were discussed.

**Keywords:** Athletes, Youth, Perceived self-esteem, Psychological well being, Student athletes.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Generally, youth athletes should participate in sports for social development, physical development, and moral development and for overall psychological well being. Stake holders in youth ports should consider sustenance and continued involvement of youths in sports while planning their programmes. Building the self-esteem of youth athletes to reflect positively on their psychological well being should be of paramount importance to stake holders so as to align with the current vision of sports as having departed from being a mere exercise to being a lucrative venture. The global role of sports towards development of youths seem to align with major concern of applied-sports psychology on how to sustain interests of athletes, improve their performance, build their self-esteem and improve their psychological well being (Cox,

2002; Murray, 1997).

Ensuring high level of psychological wellbeing among youth athletes should be a joint effort of all stakeholders to ensure corresponding impact on global health and well being (Ryff, 1995). Sports as a major aspect of work and physical activity involve brain activation, physical health and combination of other factors to improve the psychological well being of athletes (Decix, 2008).

Several researchers have conceptualized psychological well being variously as: major aspect of health, education, sports and industries, Briner (2012); combination of positive affective states to impact positively on individuals social life, positive functioning and optimal effectiveness for improved health, well being and behaviour (Decix, 2008); and the combination of

feeling good and functioning effectively (Huppert, 2007). "A life and well", "feeling good" have been popular slogans by athletes and other stakeholders in the sports and exercise sector. This could mean that psychological wellbeing by implication of its definition is not devoid of being capable to function, feeling happy, being satisfied and being able to attract social support from others.

Consequently, psychological well-being seems to be related to better physical health and normal cognitive functioning. Hence, athletes with high and positive psychological wellbeing tend to be active, agile, strong and emotionally stable to ensure proper display of skills during performance. Research also reveals psychological wellbeing as a dynamic concept, multifaceted concept and health related behaviour with social subjective and psychological dimensions (Ryff, 1995). However athlete's psychological wellbeing could help them to realize their potentials, cope with sports stress, and work productively and fruitfully so as to make meaningful contributions to their profession.

Also psychological well-being refers to individual's self-evasion of their ability to fulfill life aspirations such as support relationships, sports, music and work (Ryan, 2008; Ryff, 1989). The relationship between sport participation and psychological wellbeing seem to show that sedentary living is a major cause of poor quality of life, disability and death in many countries.

Hence, research show that important physiological and psychological changes occur during training and exercise (Biddle, Fox and Beutcher, 2000). Within sport psychology research over the past decade, there seem to have been steady increase in studies conducted with samples of competitive athletes in which well-being explicitly has been assessed as one variable. These studies have examined well-being from a variety of views and foci, including self-determination and need satisfaction, achievement goals, team cohesiveness and romantic relationship (Blanchard, Amiot, Perreault, Vallerand, and Provencher, 2009; Jowett & Cramer, 2009; Miller & Hottman, 2009; Podlog, Lochbaum and Stevens, 2010; Reinboth & Duda, 2006; Ridnour & Hammarmeister, 2008; Ryan & Bargman, 2003; Smith, Ntoumanis & duda 2007, 2010; Smith, Ntoumanis, Duda & Vansteenkiste, 2011; Solberg & Halvari, 2009; Stephen, Bilard, Ninot & Delignieres 2003; Vansteenkiste, Nouratidis, & Lens, 2010).

The increased interest in including the construct of well-being in studies has likely been stimulated by the understanding that a 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, Meiyen, McCarthy, and Sheffield, 2009; Lundquist & Kentta, 2010). Moreover, well-being likely helps athletes deal with the diverse challenges they face during their sporting career.

Indeed, a great majority of sport psychology interventions implemented and evaluated within sports psychology, focus on obstacles athletes face, but are actually designed to directly or indirectly increase competence of the athlete's well-being (Williams, 2009). Studies have also revealed that elite athletes with long, successful sports careers are characterized by a range of attributes related to well-being including, a hopeful and positive view developed skills to cope with both major and minor life challenges, and high levels of mental and emotional health (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould, Diffenbach & Moffett; 2002; Morgan, 1985). These findings provide support for the importance of self-esteem and various aspects of well-being for athletes in the context of competition as well as outside the milieu of sports.

Many athletes and performers often wrongly determine their self-worth by how successful they feel about their sport. When an athlete performs well or feels successful he or she can feel good about him or herself. However the opposite is also true, despair and how self-esteem results when this person does not perform well or view him or herself as a failure. When he or she performs well there is usually increase in self-esteem and this results to a better performance in subsequent performances. Athletes are especially vulnerable to this problem of attaching self-esteem to one's performance because you are judged by how well you perform. This is likely because, society sends subtle signals that you must achieve in your sport to feel worthy as a person and that is the trap that many athletes fall into; because they are externally controlled and probably have low psychological well-being.

In addition, if you are perfectionist, it does not help your self-esteem because you have such high expectations and are always so critical and hard on yourself. If you fall into this trap, your emotions, and how you feel about yourself, are heavily influenced by the perceptions of your performance, which can naturally vary from day to day. Thus one day you have self-esteem and the next day it erodes you due to what you think is a poor performance or practice, athletes with poor well-being are trapped in such problems. Even if he or she had a flawless performance, if he or she did not get a good reaction or the reaction he or she expected, he or she would feel like a failure. Specific to student athletes, Crawford (2007), noted that like their non athletes peers, the level of students athletes purposeful involvement in campus life and associations with faculty and peers enhanced their academic experiences. According to Crawford, student-athletes acknowledge that positive association with faculty and peers were instrumental in enhancing both their academic and athletic experiences.

Athletes with good self-esteem are more prone to getting over failure and engaging in new activities to help them forget, those who have low self-esteem find it

difficult to shake off feelings of disappointment and bitterness related to failure. Athletes with low self-esteem and poor well-being find it difficult to recover from the distress of failure in any performance. Even criticisms are addressed in different ways: people with low self-esteem are more sensitive to the intensity of discomfort caused by criticism, as well as how long it lasts. How success is dealt with is also different; quite often, athletes with low self-esteem fall into anxious happiness, which results in a difficulty to enjoy the good times and cheer up for positive reasons, because they have poor value for self, as well as the happiness felt at that moment, these people also perceived its precariousness and prepare awaiting disappointment. Therefore we can see that these people do not only feel uncomfortable when facing failure in performance but also when facing success and social consequences of it.

In addition to the feeling of anxious happiness, they may also experience cognitive dissonance (an internal contradiction to do with the negative feelings they are experiencing and the reality that surrounds them) and anxiety because they can foresee other situations in which they will be forced to guarantee success thus, keeping up with the expectation that others may have of them (Smith, Ntoumanis, Duda and Vansteenkiste, 2011). In other words, student's athletes with low self-esteem, even if they love success and the gratifications that come with it, also fear it because it contradicts their self-image and exposes them to situations in which they have to test themselves over and over again. A higher opinion of yourself is related to looking for ways to develop your personality and take risks whilst low self-esteem generates defense strategies and attempts to avoid any uncertainty. This is why student athletes with good well-being and high self-esteem want to succeed and those with low self-esteem are focused on their fear of failure.

The consequences are that high self-esteem improves well-being and makes an athlete want to explore new and different levels with greater conviction and making some mistakes along the way, whilst low self-esteem and poor well-being male athletes limit themselves to levels where they feel safe and run hardly any risks of making mistakes. Self-esteem is the regard you hold for yourself. All individual have a self-concept if you like yourself concept (who you think you are), then you have self-esteem, your self-esteem if healthy, leads you to develop self-confidence. Self-confidence is the belief in your ability to perform a given task yet one can have self-confidence and in his or her ability and self-esteem to have well-being. Self-esteem can be defined in numerous ways, most commonly self-esteem is seen as one of the basis of two psychological processes; evaluation and effect (Mruk, 2006).

Evaluation accentuates the role of cognition, while affect emphasizes the role of feelings as they pertain to

self-esteem. As much, Mruk (2006) identified four basic ways that self-esteem is defined.

1. As a certain attitude
2. Based on discrepancy
3. As a psychological response a person holds toward himself or herself and
4. As a function of personality.

In the attitudinal definition, it involves positive or negative cognitive, behavioural, and emotional reactions. When people base their self-esteem on discrepancy, they are measuring the difference between what people see as their ideal self and their perceived self. The closer these two percepts are, the higher their self-esteem is thought to be. The psychological response a person holds towards him or herself is described as feeling based rather than attitudinal alone.

However, in the function of personality definition, self-esteem is viewed as part of a system that is concerned with motivation or self-regulation, or both. While there are numerous different definitions for self-esteem, even outside this spectrum, the listed definition covers the broadest range of definition. Self-esteem and well-being are much related factors in the development and performance of student athletes, low self-esteem results to poor well-being and consequently poor sports performance.

One solution to the problems of low self-esteem and poor well-being and self-concept is positive and frequent family involvement. Ochoa, Lopez, and Emler (2007), found a link between open communication between parents and adolescents positive family self-concept, which in turn related to positive academic self-concept and good self-esteem. Positive family communication is key in helping adolescents maintain a positive high self-esteem. Self-esteem is important when studying mental well-being because:

- It has close association with emotional stability and adjustment,
- Low self-esteem features in many forms of mental illness and
- Low self-esteem is associated with poor health behaviours. It is therefore regarded as both an indicator of well-being and as a marker for recovery.

Young adults with low psychological well-being may encounter lower levels of happiness, satisfaction, and self-esteem, while experiencing high level of distress (Amato, 1994). Similarly, adolescents who possess low psychological well-being or psychological distress may also exhibit characteristics of low levels of happiness and self-efficacy, along with high levels of depression (Flour & Buchanan, 2003). Furthermore, they may view social

problems as being more serious than other students (athletes) (Wilkinson, 2004). Athletes with low psychological well-being tend to form less than desirable self-evaluations which significantly affect their happiness and satisfaction.

Psychological well-being has to do with how individuals self-evaluate and their ability to fulfill certain aspects of their lives, such as relationship, support, and work as well as sports and physical activities. (Amato, 1994, Flouri and Buchanan, 2003; Knoester, 2003; Roberts and Bengtson, 1993; Wilkinson, 2004). Individuals with low self-esteem struggle to make decisions and often put them off: when faced with more than one choice, people with low self-esteem block up and let others decide for them. This does not happen because these people are in-willed or because they are not able to make the decision themselves, but rather because they simple do not feel confident about their worth and capabilities therefore they avoid making choices, thus their behaviour is affected by an excessive forum of failure. In this sense, the risk they run is letting themselves be over influenced by their environment (parents, friends and companions) concerning both mundane, everyday choices and extreme, important choices regarding their livers such as what to study, what career to follow, how to live and so on.

Despite its conceptual elusiveness, well-being has been defined as encompassing people's cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives. Some other terms have been used interchangeably with well being, such as life satisfaction and quality of life. Previous existing research in adolescents has identified a number of significant factors associated with well-being. These include demographics (e.g) Jirojanakul et al 2003, personality such as emotional stability, general confidence, and self-esteem and life events. It may be important to emphasize that personality construct like high self-esteem have been shown to act as protective factor against psychopathology in young people MCGec and Williams (2000) in a longitudinal study focusing on adolescents found that low self-esteem significantly predicted problem eating patterns, suicidal ideation and substance use. Previous researches on the association between well-being and personality in adolescents has also shown that there is a high association between self-esteem and well-being Wilkinson (2004). In a study of 222 high school students in the USA, Dew and Hucbner found that well-being forms significant positive associations with self-esteem measures ( $r=0.15-0.62$ ,  $P<0.05$ ).

Regarding the association between well-being and self-esteem in student athletes, on which the present study is focusing on, the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions Fredrickson, 2005), has offered a theoretical explanation. In particular Fredrickson (2005) proposed that positive emotion broaden people's momentary

thought-action repertoires and these in turn serve to build their enduring personal resources, ranging From physical to intellectual resources to social and psychological resources". Self-esteem may influence human behaviour uncertain situations, life event, social relationship, goal shaping and motivation; self-esteem could be regulating well-being levels. Therefore, attempts have been made in this study to bridge this gap in knowledge through meaningful contribution to knowledge.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS

This study bothers on the following statement of problems:

- Will perceived self-esteem significantly correlate with psychological well being of student athletes?
- Will high self-esteem significantly correlate with psychological well-being of student athletes?
- Will low self-esteem significantly correlate with psychological well-being of student athletes?

## HYPOTHESES

To this effect, the following hypotheses will be tested:

- Perceived self-esteem will have significant relationship with psychological well-being of student athletes.
- High self-esteem will have significant relationship with psychological well being among student athletes.
- Low self-esteem will have significant relationship with psychological well being among student athletes.

## METHOD

### Participants

Three hundred and fifty (350) participants drawn from 100 level to 400 levels student athletes in the department of psychology, faculty of social sciences and Humanities, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, south East of Nigeria took part in the study. 100 student athletes also participated from 100 levels, 100 students athletes also participated from 200 level, and 50 students athletes participated from 300 level while 50 students athletes participated from 400 level (final years students). The participants were randomly selected across board in the

faculty auditorium before training during the just concluded 2014 faculty of social sciences and Humanities week. Three hundred (300) were males, while fifty (50) were females. 76.4% of the participants were single, 23.6% were married. All the participants were undergraduates who reported having GCE/WASC as their highest qualification and they are all literate. Their age ranged from 18-30 years, with a mean age of 24 years. All the respondents volunteered to participate in the study as they have been representing their levels (classes) and psychology department during inter-class, in-departmental and inter-faculty sports competitions.

### Instruments

A questionnaire was used for data collection. It consisted of two (2) parts. Part A comprised questions eliciting demographic information such as gender, marital status, age, experience, educational qualification, department and level. The second part B contained measures of variables of interest: perceived self-esteem and psychological well being. Self-esteem scale (SES). Rosenberg self-esteem scales (Rosenberg, 1965). Rosenberg self-esteem scale is a 10-item scale developed by Rosenberg (1965) to measure the degree to which people believe in their personal qualities and evaluate themselves to reflect agreement or disagreement. It is a four point likert format scale ranging from strongly agrees (1) to strongly disagree (5). The items are scored both directly and reversely according to the positivity and negativity of the items to reflect high and low self-esteem. Some of the items of the scale include: "I feel I am a person of worth", "on the whole I am satisfied with myself", "At times, I think I am no good at all", "All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure". The first two items are directly scored while the last two items are reversely scored.

The scale has a reliability coefficient (Cranach Alpha) of .80 and a test-retest reliability of .74. for the purpose of this study, a Cranach's alphas of .85 was obtained. Psychological well-being scale (PWBS) the psychological well-being scale was developed by Ryff and Dupuy (1995) to measure some aspects of psychological well being. PWBS is a 42 item scale on a 6 point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1). It was designed to measure the following aspects of psychological well being: Autonomy, personal growth, Environmental mastery, self-acceptance, purpose in life and positive relation. The authors reported reliability alpha of the scale to range from 0.71-0.74 and the internal consistency for the psychological well being scale to be 0.87. For the purpose of this study, a Cranach's alpha reliability coefficient of .89 was obtained.

### Procedure

The participants of the study were student athletes drawn from all the levels of students (100-400) of psychology department, Ebonyi state university, Abakaliki, South East of Nigeria. After seeking the consent of the faculty director of sports in the faculty of social sciences and Humanities Auditorium during faculty week briefing, He gave his consent for the researchers to explain to the student athletes the rationale of the study. The aim and rationale of the research were explained to them, three hundred and eighty (380) copies of the questionnaires were distributed using random sampling techniques with the help of research assistants and they filled out the questionnaires. The student athletes were motivated to fill the copies of the questionnaire within a space of thirty (30) minutes before going out for their training. Three hundred and seventy (370) copies of the questionnaires were returned, twenty (20) copies were discarded due to wrong filling while the remaining three hundred and fifty (350) copies were used for statistical analysis.

### Design/Statistics:

A cross sectional survey research design was adopted for the study, while the pearson product moment correlation and the t-test of significance was employed as tool of analysis in this study.

## RESULTS

**Hypothesis 1:** Self-esteem will have significant relationship with psychological well-being of student athletes.

Table 1 shows that since the calculated t-observed value of 0.745 for self-esteem and psychological well-being measure of student athletes is greater than the r-critical of 0.190, the first hypothesis which states that self-esteem will have significant relationship with psychological well-being was confirmed and stands accepted.

**Hypothesis II:** High self-esteem will have significant relationship with psychological well-being among student athletes.

Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 6.537 is greater than the t-critical value of 1.87 at 0.5 at probability level of significance. This indicates that there exists a significant difference between High self-esteem student athletes and low self-esteem student athletes on their psychological well being. Hence, student athletes with high self-esteem have significant relationships with

**Table 1:** Test of relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being of student athlete

Variable	N	DF	r-observed	r-critical	remark
Self-esteem	350	698	0.745	0.190	Significant
Psychological well being	350				

**Table 2:** Test of relationship between high self-esteem and psychological well-being among student athletes

Source of variation	N	X	SD	DF	t-Calculated	t-Critical	Sig
High self-esteem	232	125.88	11.73	348	6.537	1.87	S
Low self-esteem	118	117.81	9.74				

**Table 3:** Test of relationship between low self-esteem and psychological well being of student athletes

Source of variation	N	X	SD	DF	t-Calculated	t-Critical	Sig
Low self-esteem	118	117.81	9.74	348	1.189	5.345	Ns
High self-esteem	232	125.88	11.73				

psychological well-being because they are more inclined to better psychological well-being than their counterparts with low self-esteem. Therefore, the hypothesis which states that high self-esteem will have significant relationship with psychological well-being of youth athletes was confirmed and stands accepted.

**Hypothesis III:** low self-esteem will have significant relationship with psychological well-being of student athletes.

Table 3 reveal that the calculated t-value of 1.189 is less than the t-critical value of 5.345 at 0.5 probability level of significance. This indicates that there is no significant relationship between low self-esteem and psychological well-being of student athletes. Therefore, the hypothesis which states that low self-esteem will have significant relationship with psychological well being was disconfirmed, and stands rejected.

## DISCUSSION

This study sort to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being among student athletes. The student also aimed at finding the relationship between high and low self-esteem and psychological well being among youth athletes.

It was hypothesized that there would be statistical significant relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being among youth athletes. Also, it was proposed that high self-esteem will have statistically significant relationship with psychological well-being of

student athletes. It was also hypothesized that there will be statistically significant relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being.

The results of the study reveal that self-esteem has a significant positive relationship with psychological well-being of youth athletes. This reflects the perception that as self-esteem improves, so does psychological well-being. This finding is in line with several researches that have found similar relationships (Ryff, 1995; Huppert, 2007; Williams, 2009, Morgan, 1985). The result of this study also supports the findings of other researchers that self-esteem is important when studying competence, coping strategies and mental well-being because it is regarded as an indicator of psychological well being (Amato, 1994; Wilkinson, 2004; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003).

The finding of the study supports broaden-and build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2005) for theoretical explanation. Positive emotion broadens athlete's momentary thought-action repertoires to build their enduring personal resources. The results of the study also supported the second hypothesis which states that high self-esteem will have significant relationship with psychological well being. Self esteem and well being are very significant related factors in the development, competence building, skill acquisition and performance of student athletes. This research supports results of other researchers from a variety of inclinations (Miller & Hottman, 2009; Jowett & Gramer, 2009). However, the result of this study did not support the third hypothesis which states that low self-esteem will have significant relationship with psychological well-being. The result of this study countered the third hypothesis because low

self-esteem results to poor psychological well-being and consequently poor sports performance. Hence, athletes with low self-esteem and poor psychological well-being find it difficult to cope with sports stress (Crawford, 2007).

Consequently, self-esteem and psychological well-being seem to be related to better physical health, normal cognitive functioning, positive sports attitude and behaviour with normal and progressive sports performance. Therefore, encouraging athletes to adopt high self-esteem will help to boost their psychological well-being which will also contribute positively to their active and functional performance.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study has numerous implications for sports psychologists, athletes, coaches and stakeholders in sports towards sports participation, administration and performance. It has been implicated in this work that self-esteem is crucial for strong psychological well-being of athletes. Therefore, if sports psychologists, coaches, athletes, parents and other stakeholders in sports want to ensure profitable and progressive sports venture in Nigeria, they should give positive consideration to Self-esteem level of athletes vis-à-vis their psychological well-being. Also, selection of athletes should be purely based on competence, emotional stability, coping strategies, self-esteem level and level of psychological well-being among other vital factors.

### **LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

Despite the contributions of this study, it is not devoid of limitations arising from several aspects of the work that are not perfect. The use of questionnaires that the participants should fill may not guarantee authentic responses because most of the responses may be biased. Another limitation of the study is the type and nature of participants who are only undergraduate student athletes who may not give out the best in terms of exposure and experience in sports. Also, limiting the study in one university may limit the generalization of the findings.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS/FUTURE RESEARCH**

Future researchers studying self-esteem and well-being among student athletes are therefore encouraged to carefully consider the conceptual issues emphasized in this study in order to improve and enable continued progress in this research field. Research on self-esteem and well-being should encompass all levels of athletes and all categories of athletes for improvement of sports

skills and optimum performance.

Stakeholders in sports administration and performance should give positive considerations to self-esteem and psychological well-being of athletes during selection training and competition to ensure proper commitment, longevity and progressive performance among athletes.

### **CONCLUSION**

In this study, the topic perceived self-esteem and well-being among student athletes was addressed and the correlation between self-esteem and well-being clearly shown with emphasis on the need to improve the well-being of student athletes. It is concluded that the sport psychology research on well-being and self-esteem among student athletes must be given optimal attention as many studies on well-being have not been explicitly on sports and athletes. Researchers investigating athlete's well-being on a global level should adopt established base on sport psychology. At the contextual sports level it is concluded that the knowledge level of what constitutes sport-related well-being and self-esteem is presently shallow. Therefore, it is important to note that future qualitative research is warranted to enable the exploration of sport related self-esteem and well-being in a greater depth.

An increased understanding of self-esteem and well-being in athletes is needed, this knowledge could potentially address aspects of challenges in sports that constitute obstacles, so as to facilitate student athletes' possibilities to flourish and use their full potentials as both humans and athletes. Moreover an increasing body of evidence suggests that interventions geared towards increasing positive affective state may enhance well-being and health over time, which facilitates adaptive long-term coping resources.

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