Sport psychological skills training and psychological well-being in youth athletes

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D Phil: Human Movement Science

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the D Phil in Human Movement Science in the Department of Biokinetics, Sport and Leisure Sciences at the University of Pretoria.

December 2007
Unless specifically indicated to the contrary, this thesis is the result of my own work.

David John Edwards
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

God for the strength he has given me

Professor Steyn for his guidance and support over the last three years

My father for all of his love, care and support

My mother for all her love and encouragement

My sister for all her love and support

Professor Du Toit for his guidance and mentoring throughout my life

Ms. Field for her assistance and all the participants for partaking in the PST program

Experts for the knowledge and contribution they provided
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DEFINITIONS

Sport psychology: The study of human behaviour in a sport or exercise setting

Psychological skills: Broad spectrum of natural overlapping psychological abilities

Psychological skills training: Training of single psychological skills using various techniques

Psychological skills training programs: Composite package programs, which train a variety of psychological skills simultaneously

Sporting performance: Sporting outcome or result

Psychological well-being: Positive mental health

Athlete: Male or female sportsperson

Youth athlete: Male or female sportsperson below the age of 19 years

Track athlete: Sportsperson who partakes in a track athletic running event

Community: Group of individuals living together, with a common purpose

Expert: Individual with a wealth of knowledge and experience in an area of study
In sport, psychological skills training is as important as physical training. Psychological skills training (PST) package programs aim to train a variety of psychological skills simultaneously. While extensively utilized overseas, PST programs are seldomly conducted with South African elite sportspeople and are generally not available to local youth athletes. Furthermore, the impact of PST programs on life and general health and the related components of biological, psychological, social and spiritual well-being has been typically neglected, with research in this regard minimal or non-existent. For example, before this thesis, the impact of PST on the core health component of psychological well-being had not been evaluated, nor had the conceptual and/or empirical relationship between psychological skills and psychological well-being been investigated.

Although PST is often conducted individually because of its specific and personal nature, group training should not be overlooked especially in South Africa where communal living is a way of life and community interventions are an important part of health promotion. The value of broad base PST programs is that they train psychological skills as life skills thus aiding overall biopsychosocialculturalspiritual development. With these considerations in mind a triangulated design involving individual, group and community interventions, as well as elite and expert case studies was utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of a PST program and to investigate the relationship between psychological skills and psychological well-being. Results based on quantitative and qualitative outcome and process measurements indicated general improvement in psychological skills, psychological well-being and sporting
performance. Psychological skills and psychological well-being were found to be interrelated concepts, with overlapping components. Recommendations for ongoing and future research at individual, group and community level are made.
Wat sportaktiweite aanbetref, is die opleiding van sielkundige bedrewenhede net so belangrik as fisiese bedrewenhede. Die doel van sielkundige bedrewenheids-opleidingsprogramme (SBO’s) is om verskeie sielkundige bedrewenhede gelykydig oor te dra. Alhoewel sulke programme reeds in baie lande aangebied word, is daar min SBO-programme in Suid Afrika, en bykans geen vir die jeug beskikbaar nie. Verder is die positiewe effek van hierdie programme op die algemene lewe en gesondheid, veral die fisiese, sielkundige en sosiale komponente van gesondheid nie behoorlik ondervang nie. Byvoorbeeld, voor hierdie proefskrif is daar nog geen navorsing in verband met die effek van SBO-programme gedoen nie en die konseptuele verhouding tussen SBO en sielkundige welsyn nie geïdentificeer nie.

Alhoewel SBO-programme gewoonlik met individue uitgeoefen is, is daar ook groepsprogramme nodig, veral in Suid Afrika waar gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid baie beklemtoon word. Hierdie soort programme is van besondere waarde omdat dit in staat is om sielkundige bedrewenhede deel te maak van die algemene lewensvaardighede. Om hierdie rede is ’n driedimensionele navorsingsontwerp aangewend ten einde die effek van ’n SBO-program op individue, groepe en gemeenskappe te ondersoek. Die ontwerp het elite- en deskundige gevallestudies ingesluit. Die resultate dui ’n kwantitatiewe en kwalitatiewe verbetering aan in algemene sielkundige welsyn sowel as in spesifieke sportprestaties. Die interaktiewe verband tussen aangeleerde sielkundige bedrewenhede en algemene sielkundige welsyn word aangetoon. Aanbevings word gemaak wat die navorsing en praktyk op hierdie gebied sal bevorder.