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Explanatory model of psychological well-being in the university athletic context

Eduardo J. Fernández-Ozcorta^a, Bartolomé J. Almagro^b, Pedro Sáenz-López^{a*}

^aUniversity of Huelva, Avda. Tres de Marzo s/n, Huelva 21071, Spain

^bCES Cardenal Spínola-CEU (affiliated with the University of Seville), Avda. Maimónides s/n, Bormujos 41930, Spain

Abstract

The aim of this study was to test a theoretical model that explains the psychological well-being of the participants of athletic physical activities. The model theorised the effect of mastery-approach goals, of perceived emotional intelligence, and of the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs on psychological well-being. The participants were 422 physically active university students (182 females and 240 males) with a mean age of 21.47 years ($SD = 4.07$). The structural equations model demonstrated that the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs mediated the mastery approach and self-esteem and partially mediated the perceived emotional intelligence and self-esteem. Emotional intelligence and self-esteem positively predicted satisfaction with life. The results are discussed in the framework of the theory of self-determination and goal achievement theory.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, positive associations have been found between well-being and motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2001) as well as between well-being and emotion (Romero, Zapata, García-Más, Brustad, Garrido, and Letelier, 2010). Along these lines, psychological well-being has been studied from two perspectives. On the one hand, there

* Corresponding author. *E-mail address:* psaenz@uhu.es

is hedonic well-being, which refers to happiness, essential satisfaction, and affective balance. On the other hand, eudaimonic well-being refers to the assessment of the individual from their personal development (Keyes, 2006). For the study of psychological well-being in the athletic context, indicators such self-esteem and satisfaction with life have been employed (e.g. Balaguer, Castillo, and Duda, 2008).

To experience psychological well-being, an active process of seeking to attain personal goals is necessary (Chatzisarantis and Hagger, 2007). These personal goals can have two orientations, according to the theory of goal achievement (Nicholls, 1989): task (or mastery) and ego (or performance). Individuals who are task-oriented evaluate their competence through self-assessment; however, the individuals who are ego-oriented evaluate their competence through criteria of external comparison. The type of predominant goal orientation can involve positive and/or negative consequences for the well-being of athletes. In fact, recent studies (e.g. Adie, Duda, and Ntoumanis, 2010) have demonstrated the importance of 2x2 achievement goals in explaining well-being or ill-being experienced by athletes.

On the other hand, according to self-determination theory, the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs can improve physical and psychological well-being (Deci and Ryan, 2000). In this sense, the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs improves the indicators of well-being in athletes (e.g. López-Walle, Balaguer, Castillo, and Tristán, 2012).

Another construct that is related to well-being is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is an individual's ability to recognise emotions and to control them effectively in the search for personal and social well-being (Mayer, Roberts, and Barsade, 2008). There are various studies that have associated these two topics (e.g. Rey, Extremera, and Pena, 2011). However, the study of perceived emotional intelligence and its relationship with well-being is new in the context of sport and physical activity. Along these lines, perceived emotional intelligence (PEI) has been demonstrated to have an important role in the explanation of well-being in athletes (Núñez, León, González, and Martín-Albo, 2011).

In accordance with the scientific literature, the objective of the present study was to assess a theoretical model that explains the psychological well-being of the participants of physical activity and sport. For that, a structural equations model was designed that theorised that the master-approach goal would predict the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of university students in exercise. The satisfaction of the three psychological needs would predict self-esteem and at the same time, self-esteem would predict the satisfaction with life. Further, emotional intelligence would be a predictor of the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs, of self-esteem, and of one's satisfaction with life for university students.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The sample was composed of 182 women and 240 men between the ages of 17 and 51 years ($M = 21.47$, $SD = 4.07$). The sample was collected from the various faculties of a public Spanish university. A selection from the various degrees and class groups that each of the faculties was composed of was done, utilising a random sampling in two stages and by conglomerates. Further, as inclusion criteria, only physically active students were utilised. To determine which students were physically active: 1) only those students that confirmed that they practice sport or physical activity at least two times per week were surveyed, and 2) from the calculation of physical activity through the Habitual Physical Activity Questionnaire (Baecke, Burema, and Frijters, 1982), half of the highest achievable score had to be reached.

2.2. Instruments

- **Habitual Physical Activity.** The Spanish version (Sarriá, Selles, Canedo-Arguelles, Fleta, Blasco, and Bueno, 1987) of the Habitual Physical Activity Questionnaire by Baecke et al., 1982 was utilised. The internal consistency was .70.

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