

Review

The psychosocial aspects of a return to sport following serious injury: A review of the literature from a self-determination perspective

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Abstract

Objectives: The objective of this paper is to review the literature relevant to the psychosocial aspects of a return to sport following injury using a self-determination theoretical (SDT) framework.

Methods: The literature was reviewed qualitatively. SDT was used to interpret and bring coherence to the diverse array of findings.

Results: The review is divided into four main sections. In section one, two conceptual models—the biopsychosocial model and the stages of return to sport model—that have been used to describe the return to sport following injury are examined and critiqued. In light of the limitations of these two models, SDT is presented as a potentially useful framework for synthesising the extant literature and making suggestions for future research on return to sport after injury phenomena (Section 2). Analysis of the psychosocial sport injury literature within a self-determination framework (Section 3) reveals the ways in which issues of competence, autonomy and relatedness may be salient during the return transition. In the fourth and final section, the implications of the findings are discussed and suggestions for future research are provided in line with self-determination theoretical contentions.

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Conclusions: SDT has potential for understanding findings in this area and for guiding future research. From an applied perspective, ensuring athletes' needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness are met, may yield beneficial return-to-sport outcomes.

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Introduction

Over the past three decades, a greater awareness of the psychosocial factors involved in sport injury occurrence and rehabilitation have led to extensive research efforts on these subjects. More recently, there has been a growing interest in the psychological aspects of the return to sport following serious injury (Andersen, 2001; Bianco, 2001; Evans, Hardy, & Fleming, 2000; Gould, Udry, Bridges, & Beck, 1997a; Taylor & Taylor, 1997). Two important developments have promoted this interest. First, it has increasingly been recognized that physical and psychological readiness to return to sport after injury do not always coincide (Crossman, 1997; Ford & Gordon, 1998). Second, there has been an increase in the incidence of serious injury, at the elite level (e.g., Orchard & Seward, 2002; Renstrom, 1991). Therefore, the number of returning athletes who are physically but not necessarily psychologically prepared to re-enter training and competition may also be on the rise.

This paper utilizes self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000) to examine and critique research investigations and reports on the psychosocial sport injury literature dealing with

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