

EXAMINING SOCIAL SUPPORT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING DIFFERENCES AMONG YOUTH ACROSS VARIOUS SPORTS

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Published date: 15 September 2025

ABSTRACT

Social support and psychological well-being interrelated where various forms of assistance and care within the social network will encompass positive emotions, self-acceptance, and personal growth in youth sports. However, further research is needed to determine how social support and psychological well-being differ across different sports to tailor support effectively and maximize the mental health benefits for young athletes. The cross-sectional research design and an anonymous online survey to collect data from 298 SUKMA athletes in Negeri Sembilan was performed. The questionnaires used to measure social support was The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and psychological well-being was Psychological Well-being Scale. It involved Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance subscales. The independent t-test was computed to examine the differences between social support and psychological well-being between types of participation in sports. There was a significant disparity in social support between different types of sports among athletes [$t(296)=2.82, p=0.005$]. The difference in the level of Significance Others between individual (mean=5.45, SD=1.38) and team sports (mean=4.97, SD=1.79) was significant, $t(296)=2.66, p=0.008$. The family support significant difference between individual sports (mean=5.57, SD=1.31) and team sports (mean=5.05, SD=1.71), $t(296)=2.99, p=0.003$. The individual athletes (mean=5.31, SD=1.39) reported a substantially higher level of agreeableness compared to team sports (mean=4.92, SD=1.72) in terms of friend support, $t(296)=2.12, p=0.035$. There was no significant difference in environmental mastery between individuals (mean=14.40, SD=2.76) and team sports (mean=14.05, SD=2.18), $t(296)=1.17, p=0.243$. While other parameters of psychological well-being indicated the statistical significance of the results among various types of sports. Team sports, on the other hand, encourage people to work together and help each other, but they may limit people's chances to achieve personal goals and grow as individuals by putting more emphasis on group goals and social interaction.

Keywords: social support, psychological well-being, youth, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance

INTRODUCTION

Social support in youth sports involves providing various forms of assistance and care within the social network, contributing to athletes' well-being. Psychological well-being encompasses positive emotions, self-acceptance, and personal growth, reflecting an individual's mental health state. Youth competitive sport involves organized sports activities with a focus on skill development and structured competitions among young participants.

Engaging in competitive sports during adolescence provides both physical and mental health advantages, however the connection between sports and mental well-being is intricate (Graupensperger et al., 2021). Studies indicate that participation in team sports can effectively mitigate psychological distress and foster favourable personal growth (Bean et al., 2014; Hurley et al., 2018). Sports have a positive influence on the growth of socially disadvantaged young people, enhancing their behaviour, academic performance, and general welfare (Super et al., 2018). The COVID-19 epidemic has emphasised the significance of extracurricular activities in promoting mental well-being. Research has demonstrated that inclusive sports policies can offer equal mental health benefits to young people as their peers (LaForge-MacKenzie et al., 2022; LaRocca et al., 2022). Receiving support from family, friends, coaches, and teammates is crucial for strengthening resilience and fostering mental well-being through emotional, practical, informational, and evaluative help (Santos et al., 2018; Andersson, 2019).

Recent studies have explored how different types of social support and psychological well-being vary among young people involved in various sports. The support from family, friends, teachers, and teammates plays a crucial role in shaping children's experiences in sports (O'Brien et al., 2021). It has been found that both parental and peer support significantly impact a child's motivation, participation, and likelihood of staying involved in sports or dropping out (O'Brien et al., 2021). Additionally, the availability of social and emotional support in youth sports is often linked to opportunities for children to join sports activities, which can further enhance their experience (Elliott et al., 2021).

Research has shown that social support significantly influences the psychological well-being of young athletes, with support from family, friends, coaches, and teammates contributing to better mental health and overall sports experiences (Super et al., 2018). However, there is a gap in understanding how different types of sports affect the nature and impact of this social support. While studies highlight that sports participation generally promotes positive behavior, health, and a sense of purpose, it is unclear how these benefits vary across different sports disciplines (Novak et al., 2020). Additionally, while sports-based programs are known to enhance physical health and social skills among at-risk youth, the specific effects of various sports on these outcomes are not fully explored (Kalekye, 2024). Thus, further research is needed to determine how social support and psychological well-being differ across different sports to tailor support effectively and maximize the mental health benefits for young athletes. Understanding these dynamics can inform the development of interventions and programs aimed at optimizing the mental health benefits of sports participation among young athletes.

METHODOLOGY

Adolescent athletes are experiencing a crucial period of development characterised by fast physical, psychological, and social transformations. Williams et al. (2020) assert that the quality of coaching and support systems during early experiences in sports significantly impact an individual's future in the sport. This study employed a cross-sectional design and a sample of 298 SUKMA athletes were randomly selected online from 500 population of athletes participated in Negeri Sembilan. The survey encompassed enquiries regarding participants' personal details and employed dependable scales to evaluate their psychological well-being and social support. Participants provided their informed consent electronically before to their participation.

Questionnaire:

The survey included questionnaires that were used to gather information about the respondents' demographic, social support, and psychological well-being. The initial questions of the survey instrument

assessed demographic variables including gender, age, race, highest educational attainment, type of sports, highest level of competition, and frequency of participation at the National level. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988) used to assess the participants' perceived level of social support. The scale items were rated on a scale from 0 to 7, ranging from "very strongly disagree" to "very strongly agree". The psychological well-being of the athletes was measured by The 18-item Psychological Well-being Scale (Ryff et al., 2010; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). This scale includes the following dimensions: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance subscales. Higher scores indicate elevated levels of psychological well-being among the participants.

Statistical analyses

The analyses were conducted using IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 (IBM Corp.). Descriptive statistics were computed to provide an overview of the characteristics of the respondents and the variables of interest in the study. To examine the differences on social support and psychological well-being between types of participation in sports, independent t-tests were computed. The parametric test had been chosen because the data showed no obvious skewness and an approximately normal. A predetermined alpha level of 0.05 was established to signify statistical significance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A compilation of 298 SUKMA athletes from Negeri Sembilan have been gathered. Male athletes were the majority (n=177, 59 percent); female athletes comprised just 41 percent (n=121). SUKMA athletes are 16.67 years old on average (SD=1.92), which corresponds to the mean age of the participants. Furthermore, it corresponds to the secondary school level of education held by 69 percent of the sample (n=206). 58% (n=172) of the athletes identified as Malay, followed by 19% (n=58) as Chinese, 21% (n=62) as Indian, and 2% (n=6) as Others. Individual sports were participated in by 56% (n=168) as opposed to team sports by 44% (n=130). A greater proportion of them (n=213, 71 percent) have participated in national competitions as opposed to international competitions (n=85, 29 percent).

Table 1: Demographic profile of the athletes (n=298)

		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	177	59.00
	Female	121	41.00
Age in years	Mean (SD)	16.67 (1.92)	
Race	Malay	172	58.00
	Chinese	58	19.00
	Indian	62	21.00
	Others	6	2.00
Highest Level of Education	Secondary school	206	69.00
	SPM	29	10.00
	STPM	5	2.00
	Diploma	41	14.00
	Bachelor	16	5.00
Type of Sports	Individual	168	56.00
	Team	130	44.00
Highest Level of Competition	National	213	71.00
	International	85	29.00
Frequency of involvement in national level	No involvement	25	12.00
	1	51	24.00
	2	34	16.00
	3	25	12.00

	4	18	8.00
	5	27	13.00
	More than 5	33	14.00
Frequency of involvement in national level	No involvement	4	5.00
	1	17	20.00
	2	19	22.00
	3	15	18.00
	4	12	14.00
	5	2	2.00
	More than 5	16	21.00

The data collection process of this study aimed to address the following research objectives: to examine the psychological well-being factors of Negeri Sembilan SUKMA athletes; to investigate the social support factors among Negeri Sembilan SUKMA athletes; and to examine the difference of social support and psychological well-being between types of sport among Negeri Sembilan SUKMA athletes. The initial objective is delineated in Table 1, which presents the three subfactors of social support: support from significant others, support from family and friends. The findings from the factors reported indicate that a substantial proportion of the athletes consider family support (mean=5.34, SD=1.52) to be the primary source of social support. This is followed by significant others (mean=5.24, SD=1.59) and friends (mean=5.14, SD=1.59).

Table 2: The social support factors among Negeri Sembilan SUKMA athletes.

Social Support	Mean	SD
Significant Others	5.24	1.59
Family Support	5.34	1.52
Friends Support	5.14	1.55
Overall Social Support	5.24	1.43

Personal growth accounted for the greatest degree of psychological well-being among the athletes (mean=15.54, SD=3.05), as seen in Table 3 for the second objective. Subsequently, self-acceptance stands at a mean of 15.00 (SD=2.56), followed by environmental mastery at 14.25 (SD=2.53), autonomy at 14.17 (SD=2.30), positive interpersonal relationships at 12.15 (SD=2.91), and a sense of purpose in life at 12.12 (SD=2.92).

Table 3: The psychological well-being factors among Negeri Sembilan SUKMA athletes.

Psychological Well-being	Mean	SD
Autonomy	14.17	2.30
Environmental Mastery	14.25	2.53
Personal Growth	15.54	3.05
Positive Relations with Others	12.15	2.91
Purpose in Life	12.12	2.92
Self-Acceptance	15.00	2.56

Table 4 presents differences in social support variables and psychological well-being elements among Negeri Sembilan SUKMA players based on the type of sports they participate in. In overall, there is a documented significant disparity in social support between different types of sports among athletes [$t(296)=2.82$, $p=0.005$]. There is a significant difference in the level of Significance Others between individual (mean=5.45, SD=1.38) and team sports (mean=4.97, SD=1.79) among Negeri Sembilan SUKMA athletes, $t(296)=2.66$, $p=0.008$. Furthermore, there is evidence suggesting that there is a significant discrepancy in family support between individual sports (mean=5.57, SD=1.31) and team sports (mean=5.05, SD=1.71), $t(296)=2.99$, $p=0.003$. The individual athletes (mean=5.31, SD=1.39) reported a substantially higher level of agreeableness compared to team sports (mean=4.92, SD=1.72) in terms of friend support, $t(296)=2.12$, $p=0.035$.

Table 4: Difference of social support and psychological well-being between types of sports among Negeri Sembilan SUKMA athletes

		Type of Sports		t	df	p value
		Individual (n=168)	Team (n=130)			
Social Support	Significant Others	5.45 (1.38)	4.97 (1.79)	2.66	296	0.008*
	Family Support	5.57 (1.31)	5.05 (1.71)	2.99	296	0.003*
	Friends Support	5.31 (1.39)	4.92 (1.72)	2.12	296	0.035*
	Overall Social support	5.44 (1.23)	4.98 (1.62)	2.82	296	0.005*
Psychological Well-being	Autonomy	14.42 (2.59)	13.86 (1.84)	2.07	296	0.039*
	Environmental Mastery	14.40 (2.76)	14.05 (2.18)	1.17	296	0.243
	Personal Growth	16.04 (3.21)	14.90 (2.72)	3.24	296	0.001*
	Positive Relations with Others	12.55 (3.15)	11.63 (2.50)	2.74	296	0.007*
	Purpose in Life	12.69 (3.01)	11.39 (2.64)	3.89	296	<0.001*
	Self-Acceptance	15.39 (2.74)	14.50 (2.21)	3.03	296	0.003*

*p<0.05

The study found no significant difference in environmental mastery between individuals (mean=14.40, SD=2.76) and team sports (mean=14.05, SD=2.18), $t(296)=1.17$, $p=0.243$. While other parameters indicated the statistical significance of the results among various types of sports. The results revealed a significant difference in the autonomy component between individual (mean=14.42, SD=2.59) and team sports (mean=13.86, SD=1.84), $t(296)=2.07$, $p=0.039$. The study found that personal growth was significantly higher in individual sports (mean=16.04, SD=3.21) compared to team sports (mean=14.90, SD=2.72), $t(296)=3.24$, $p=0.001$.

The study found a significant difference in the reported positive relations with others between individual sports (mean=12.55, SD=3.15) and team sports (mean=11.63, SD=2.50), $t(296)=2.74$, $p=0.007$. The study found a significant difference in the reported purpose in life between individuals (mean=12.69, SD=3.01) and team sports (mean=11.39, SD=2.64), $t(296)=3.89$, $p<0.001$. The study found a statistically significant difference in self-acceptance between individual sports (mean=15.39, SD=2.74) and team sports (mean=14.50, SD=2.21), $t(296)=3.03$, $p=0.003$.

Youths' participation in team and individual competitive sports is affected by different types of support, such as help from a significant other, family, and peers. Family and peer support affects more than just sports involvement. It affects a wide range of developmental experiences and outcomes. Youths who play team sports like football or soccer say they can improve their social and leadership skills, as well as their ability to control their emotions and take the lead. This shows that team sports are good for teens' overall development (Perron-Gélinas et al., 2017). Support from family and friends can also lessen the effects of depression, aggression, and being rejected by peers. This is especially true for teens who play competitive sports (Denault & Poulin, 2018).

Athletes in individual sports, like tennis or swimming, often get more personal support from family and friends compared to those in team sports. This is because individual sports usually involve less daily interaction with teammates, making personal relationships crucial for emotional and motivational support (Schmidt et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2023). When athletes train or compete alone, they rely more on their close connections to stay mentally strong and focused. This has been shown in other studies as well, which

found that personal support plays a big role in helping individual sports athletes manage their challenges (Hodge et al., 2021; Côté et al., 2022; Eys et al., 2015).

On the other hand, team sports, such as football or basketball, involve a group of players who share the support among themselves. This means that while athletes benefit from encouragement from teammates and coaches, the focus on individual support might be less intense (Smith et al., 2023; Lee & Lee, 2024). The support in team sports comes from the collective environment, which helps in creating a supportive team atmosphere but may not always address the specific personal support needed for individual athletes (Williams et al., 2021). Earlier research also points out that team sports offer a different kind of support, with both collective and individual aspects playing important roles (Carron et al., 2018; Beauchamp et al., 2019).

These differences show that each type of sport has unique support needs. Individual sports often require strong personal support because of their solitary nature, while team sports provide a more general, collective support. Understanding these different support needs can help in creating better strategies to support athletes based on the type of sport they are involved in (Nguyen et al., 2024a; Johnson et al., 2023; Schmidt et al., 2022; Eklund & Tenenbaum, 2022). The study's results highlight notable differences in psychological well-being between individual and team sports athletes, with significant findings in areas such as autonomy, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

Athletes in individual sports reported higher levels in these areas compared to their team sports counterparts. This aligns with research suggesting that the solitary nature of individual sports often necessitates and thus enhances personal reflection and self-reliance, which can lead to greater autonomy and personal growth (Schmidt et al., 2022a; Eklund & Tenenbaum, 2022). Schmidt et al. (2022a) emphasize that the independence required in individual sports fosters a sense of personal achievement and self-acceptance, as athletes are more directly responsible for their successes and failures. Additionally, personal growth in individual sports is often linked to the need for athletes to set and achieve personal goals without the immediate support of a team, thereby enhancing their sense of purpose and self-efficacy (Martin & Marsh, 2024).

While team sports promote important social interactions and collective support, they may result in slightly lower scores in autonomy, personal growth, and self-acceptance. Team sports are characterized by shared responsibilities and collective goals, which can diffuse individual recognition and personal development (Smith & Smoll, 2023; Wang & Zhang, 2023). The collective dynamics in team sports, while beneficial for fostering teamwork and social support, may limit individual opportunities for personal reflection and self-directed growth (Johnson & Nicholls, 2023). This is consistent with findings from Biddle and Wang (2022), who note that team sports often emphasize group cohesion and shared objectives, which can sometimes overshadow individual achievements and personal development. Thus, the unique demands and structures of individual versus team sports create distinct pathways to psychological well-being, underscoring the need for tailored support strategies in different sporting contexts.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that athletes who play individual sports are significantly less mentally healthy than athletes who play team sports. People who play individual sports feel more freedom, personal growth, good social connections, a sense of purpose in life, and acceptance of themselves than people who play team sports. These results show that playing individual sports, where you're usually by yourself, can help you become more self-reliant and think more deeply about yourself, which can improve many aspects of your mental health. Team sports, on the other hand, encourage people to work together and help each other, but they may limit people's chances to achieve personal goals and grow as individuals by putting more emphasis on group goals and social interaction.

In the future, researchers should look into the long-term benefits of different types of support on athletes' mental health. There is a good chance that longitudinal studies will help us understand how consistent support affects growth. A deeper understanding of these processes could also be gained by looking at the cultural and environmental factors that affect support systems. Making changes to improve support in both individual and team sports could help fix problems with self-acceptance, personal growth, and autonomy that have been seen. This could lead to better ways to support athletes' mental health in a variety of athletic settings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the SUKMA athletes in Negeri Sembilan for their valuable participation and contributions to this study. Their cooperation and willingness to share their time and experiences were instrumental to the success of this research.

CONFLICT OF INTREST

No conflict of interest is declared by the authors.

FUNDING

In addition, no financial support was received.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

AP Dr. Rozita Abdul Latif was responsible for the preparation of the abstract, introduction, and methodology sections of the manuscript. Wahidah Tumijan conducted the data analysis and prepared the results. Hasmiza Abdul Majeed contributed to the discussion and was responsible for formatting the final manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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