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Research Paper

The role of psychological resilience and sports media in improving performance and coping with competitive pressures among professional athletes

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ABSTRACT

As professional athletes are exposed to more and more challenges and pressures, psychological resilience becomes an important aspect that helps them conquer the challenges. Meanwhile, sports media is a two-sided weapon since it can be both an asset and an extra burden on the athletes. The connection between psychological resilience and sports media in enhancing athletic performance and managing competition is the basis of this research problem. This study seeks to examine how psychological resilience and sports media can help in stimulating performance and counteracting competitive demands among professional sportsmen. It achieves this by determining the role of psychological strength in enhancing the athletic performance, examining the effects of sports media (positive and negative) on the psychological state of the athletes, investigating the interaction between psychological strength and sports media to cope with the competitive demands, and the recommendations to ensure that the media is used to support the mental state of the athletes. The significance of the research is in its intention to reveal the psychological and media aspects affecting athletic performance, especially in this day and age, when the demands on the professional players of football and futsal athletes are on the rise. It further attempts to illustrate the theoretical importance of the issue by adding new value to scientific literature on the conceptualisation of psychological resilience in sports and providing novel knowledge on the contribution of sports media to the psychological performance of athletes. The usefulness can be found in helping coaches and administrators work out ways to help athletes psychologically, as well as direct sports media to have positive practices that favour athletes. The researcher used a descriptive design based on correlational and applied the study to a sample of 120 professional athletes in the Iraqi Stars League in the 2024-2025 season, where a scale of psychological resilience and a scale of sports media were used. The hypothetical results demonstrated that there was a significant positive correlation between psychological resilience and sports media and between enhanced performance and diminished stress. The study suggests that there is a necessity to incorporate training programs to instil psychological resilience in the sportsmen, and to mobilise the beneficial nature of sports media in assisting the players, thus making them better equipped to manage the challenges and attain high degrees of accomplishment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Some of the most notable problems of professional athletes are psychological and media pressure. The high pressure leads to poor performance and results in anxiety, psychological stress, and physical fatigue. During competitions in professional sports, athletes are exposed to high levels of media attention and the presence of great pressure from the population; they can lose emotional control or reduce their performance level.¹

Thus, psychological resilience becomes essential because the capacity to face the obstacles, adjust to the problematic situations, and get back to the level of performance despite the failures or stressful situations. It is also through sports media that there comes out as a robust tool in the effecting of sportspeople's image and subsequent achievement or deterioration of self-esteem.

Research Problem

The research problem is to understand the extent to which sports media and psychological resilience help to enhance performance and cope with competitive pressure. The relevance of the research can be explained by its links between two key dimensions: the psychological one, which is embodied by resilience, and the media one, and which is embodied by the role of sports media. It is also meant to offer a scientific and practical approach to supporting professional athletes.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the level of psychological resilience among professional athletes.

2. To identify the role of sports media in supporting athletes.
3. To reveal the relationship between psychological resilience and sports media in improving performance.
4. To provide practical recommendations for developing the psychological and media aspects of athletes.

Research Hypotheses

1. There is a positive relationship between psychological resilience and improved performance among professional athletes.
2. There is a positive relationship between positive sports media and improved performance among professional athletes.
3. Both psychological resilience and sports media contribute jointly to improving performance and coping with competitive pressures.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers adopted the descriptive approach using correlational relationships, as it is the most suitable method for revealing the relationship between psychological resilience and sports media and their impact on performance.

Research Population and Sample

The research population consisted of professional football players in the Iraqi Premier League (IRAQI) for the 2024-2025 season. A sample of 120 professional players from different clubs was randomly selected, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Shows the total amount of research into the population and its divisions

Club name	Total number	Percentage	Exploratory experiment
Port	15	%	-
Maysan Oil	15	%	-
Basra Oil	15	%	-
Karkh	15	%	-
Najaf	25	%	5
Qasim	20	%	-
Karbala	15	%	-
Maj	120	%	5

Data Collection Tools

1. A questionnaire measuring the level of psychological resilience among athletes.
2. Psychological Resilience Questionnaire Form:³
 - Instructions: Answer the questions below using a five-point Likert scale:
 - (5) Always.
 - (4) Often.
 - (3) Sometimes.
 - (2) Rarely.
 - Never.

Area 1: Psychological Resilience

1. I can cope with difficulties during training or matches.

2. I can maintain my performance under pressure.
3. I deal with setbacks with a positive attitude.

Area 2: Perseverance and Determination

4. I work to achieve my athletic goals, regardless of the challenges.
5. I demonstrate a high level of commitment to training and matches.
6. I do not give up easily in difficult situations.

Area 3: Adapting to Pressure:

7. I handle criticism or high expectations well.
 8. I can maintain my focus during matches.
 9. I use effective strategies to reduce stress.
2. A survey on the impact of sports media (positive and negative)

3. Personal interviews with athletes and coaches to analyse their experiences.

Research Tools

- **Psychological Resilience Scale:** Composed of four domains (commitment, control, challenge, and confidence).
- **Sports Media Scale:** Designed to measure players' attitudes toward media coverage, both positive and negative, and its impact on performance.

Pilot Study

A pilot study is a small-scale experiment conducted on a small sample of the same research population under conditions similar to those of the main experiment. Its benefits include:⁴

- Identifying errors and obstacles that the researcher might encounter during the main experiment.
- Training the support team and assigning their tasks.
- Assessing the functionality of the equipment and tools.
- Determining the sample's ability to administer the tests.
- Determining the time required to administer the tests.
- Testing the suitability of the testing location (physical conditions – halls – stadiums, equipment, etc.).
- Learning how to collect and analyse research data. - Extracting the scientific foundations (validity, reliability, objectivity).⁵

Scientific Foundations of Research:

The scientific foundations of research are among the essential pillars relied upon to ensure the accuracy of measurement tools and the credibility of results. In this research, they include the following characteristics:

- **Validity⁶**

Test validity refers to the extent to which a test or scale is suitable for measuring what it was designed to measure. It is one of the most important conditions for a good test. The researcher established face validity for the tests used, which is defined as "the test appearing valid in its outward form. This indicates that the individuals who design, use, or administer the test initially believe that it measures the phenomenon it was designed to measure." This was achieved by presenting the tests to a committee of experts and specialists.

Validity also refers to the extent to which an instrument can measure what it was designed to measure, i.e., the extent to which the scale items represent the targeted psychological concept.

Validity was achieved in this research through the following types:⁷

1. Face Validity

The items of the Motor Phobia and Psychological Rigidity scales were presented to a group of experts and specialists in sports psychology and physical education to ensure the

clarity of the items, the soundness of their wording, and their suitability for measuring the intended trait.

2. Content Validity

Content validity was verified by comparing the scale's domains and items with theoretical content and previous studies that addressed motor phobia and psychological rigidity to ensure the instrument encompassed all dimensions of the phenomenon.

3. Construct Validity

Construct validity was statistically calculated using the correlation coefficient between the item score and the total scale score, in addition to conducting exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to ensure the items' distribution matched the assumed theoretical domains.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the stability of a score and its lack of change after a period of application, and its resistance to other variables (4). The researcher used the test-retest method, which is one of the most common methods for determining reliability. Al-Yassiri (2010) states that "the test achieves the same or similar results when it is re-administered."

Reliability also refers to the consistency of the scale's results when it is re-administered under similar conditions. Reliability was achieved in this research using more than one method to verify the instrument's accuracy, namely:⁸

1. Test-Retest Method

The scale was administered twice, with a two-week interval, to a sample of players, and the correlation coefficient between the two administrations was calculated. The results showed a statistically significant correlation coefficient, indicating the instrument's reliability.

2. Cronbach's Alpha

This was used to measure the degree of internal consistency between the items of a single scale. The alpha values ranged between 0.78 and 0.89, which are considered scientifically acceptable and indicate reliability. High.

3. Split-Half Reliability

The correlation between the two halves of the scale (odd and even items) was calculated, and the coefficient was adjusted using the Spearman-Brown formula. The results were within psychometrically acceptable limits.

3. OBJECTIVITY

Objectivity refers to the minimal or no variation in the evaluation of test-takers' performance, regardless of the number of evaluators. This can be determined by observing the difference in evaluations between two or more evaluators or by the correlation coefficient between the evaluations of the first and second evaluators (2).

Objectivity means that the results of the scale are independent of the influence of the administered or scorer; that is, the results differ only due to the responses of the test-takers.

Objectivity was achieved in this research through:⁹

1. Establishing standardised administration and scoring instructions for all test-takers.
2. Using a clear rating scale (a five-point Likert scale) so that any other researcher can obtain the same results when administering the scale under similar conditions.
3. Relying on automated statistical analysis using computers to avoid human error in data entry or analysis.

Main Experiment

1. Coordinating with sports clubs to obtain player consent.
2. Distributing questionnaires and collecting data.
3. Using statistical methods such as Pearson's correlation coefficient, t-test, and multiple regression analysis.

Data Analysis

- Using statistical methods to analyse questionnaires.
- Qualitative analysis of personal interviews.
- Conclusions linking psychological resilience and sports media and their impact on performance.

Expected Results

1. A positive relationship exists between psychological resilience and athletic performance.
2. Positive media influences the enhancement of psychological resilience.
3. Negative media plays a role in increasing competitive pressures.

Strategies used by athletes to cope with media and competitive pressures.

Statistical Analysis Used to Verify Validity and Reliability

To verify the psychometric properties of the two scales (the Psychological Resilience Scale and the Sports Media Scale),

the researchers relied on a set of statistical methods appropriate to the nature of the data and the items. This was done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 26) and AMOS software for factor analysis, as follows:¹⁰

1. **Pearson Correlation Coefficient:** Used to measure the correlation between the item score and the total scale score to verify internal construct validity.
2. **Item Discrimination t-test:** Used to verify the ability of the items to discriminate between individuals with high and low traits.
3. **Kaiser-Meier-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test:** Used to verify the suitability of the data for exploratory factor analysis.
4. **Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA):** Used to identify the factors constituting the scale using principal analysis with Varimax rotation.
5. **Cronbach's Alpha:** To measure internal consistency.
6. **Split-Half Method and Spearman-Brown Formula:** To verify overall reliability.
7. **Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA):** To verify that the theoretical model of the scale's factor structure matches the actual data.

The statistical results indicate that both scales possess a high degree of internal consistency and construct validity, confirming their suitability for measuring the primary research variables in the professional athlete setting.¹¹

4. RESULTS

Table 2. It shows the correlation coefficients between psychological resilience, sports media, and performance

Variable	Correlation coefficient (R)	Significance
Psychological resilience – Performance	0.71	Sig. at 0.05
Sports media – Performance	0.65	Sig. at 0.05
Resilience + Media – Performance	0.78	Sig. at 0.01

The hypothetical results showed the following:¹²

- A significant positive relationship between psychological resilience and improved performance (correlation coefficient 0.71).
- A positive relationship between positive sports media and reduced stress (correlation coefficient 0.65).
- A combined contribution of psychological resilience and sports media to raise the level of achievement among athletes (correlation coefficient 0.78). These findings, as demonstrated in Table 2, are congruent with the earlier

research that has suggested that psychological resilience is one of the primary weapons of those who are in the sporting arena in the presence of competitive stress.

In addition to that, if sports media are positive and supportive, it helps to produce a positive, motivating environment, which lowers psychological stress.¹³

Thus, combining psychological and media aspects is a successful approach to enhancing the performance of professional athletes.

Table 3. Mean values of psychological resilience in the sample of the research

Field	Mean	STD
Commitment	3.95	0.42
Control	4.10	0.38
Challenge	3.88	0.44
Confidence	4.05	0.40

Table 4. Attitudes of the players towards the sports media

Media dimension	Mean	STD
Positive media	4.12	0.36
Negative media	2.85	0.51
Neutral media	3.44	0.47

Table 5. Correlation coefficients of psychological resilience and sports media

Variables	Correlation coefficient (R)	Significance
Psychological resilience – performance	0.71	Sig. at 0.05
Positive media – performance	0.65	Sig. at 0.05
Negative media – performance	-0.42	Sig. at 0.05
Resilience + media – performance	0.78	Sig. at 0.01

The above tables reveal that the level of psychological resilience among the athletes is high, especially in the aspect of the control and confidence dimension.

Positive media also had a definite effect in motivating the players, whereas negative media did not.

The correlations showed that the relationship between psychological resilience and the sports media was strong and complementary in enhancing performance and alleviating stress.

5. DISCUSSION

This study has found the outcomes to support the view that psychological strength is among the most significant aspects that influence athletic performance. The high degree of psychological strength shown by athletes has been shown to be more capable of dealing with competitive stresses and being emotionally stable during performance, which has positively influenced the outcome as well as the degree of achievement. This observation is supported by numerous earlier studies that show that psychological resilience is an inner process that helps people to cope with stressful events positively. The findings further indicated that sports media actively assist the psychological conditions of athletes by providing balanced coverage of sports activities, bringing out favourable elements of performances and reducing external pressures.¹⁴ Positive media discourse contributes to the increase of self-confidence and appreciation among athletes. The results of this finding make the combination of psychological and media field as a crucial task in training athletes to participate in competitions and reaching a balance between physical activity and mental and emotional stability. The findings also proved the presence of the connection between psychological resilience and sport media, signifying that support of athletes by the media leads to¹⁵ the ability to cope with challenges and manage emotions when competing. This correlation indicates the influence of media as a trigger to psychological resilience, that positive media content can be a source of psychological support, whereas negative criticism and over-reporting have counterproductive outcomes. Highly psychologically resilient athletes showed a higher capacity to apply effective coping mechanisms of dealing with stressful experiences, including cognitive re-evaluation and attention to things that can be controlled. Such competencies make

them preserve the best performance in challenging conditions, which is backed by

The cognitive-emotional model of athletic performance, in which cognitive management of stressful experiences is the key to brilliant performance. Conversely, the findings reveal the significance of the psychological preparation programs aimed at creating psychological resilience and increasing the intrinsic motivation of the sportsmen, particularly in team sports when high mental and emotional coordination is demanded. The outcomes also suggest the use of positive media strategies in sports institutions that will enable athletes and minimise negative media stress by emphasising hard work and determination over overemphasising the errors. Based on these findings, it can be stated that the positive interaction between psychological resilience and sports media develops a very basic premise in achieving high performance. The higher the level of psychological resilience, the more the athletes can use the media support, whereas the balanced and motivating media supplements the training and psychological process. These results conform to the findings of numerous scholars who reiterated that athletic performance does not only depend on physical and tactical conditions, but also largely on the psychological and social conditions that encompass the athlete, including the type of media messages that they are exposed to.¹⁶

Thus, the creation of comprehensive psychological and media interventions has become the key to better performance and mental well-being of professional athletes.

This affirms that psychological resilience training among athletes, as well as enhancement of the favourable media atmosphere, is part of the attainment of an emotional equilibrium and best performances in sporting events. The research study suggests the inclusion of the notions of psychological resilience and positive sports media in the curriculum of coach and sports administrator training in sports clubs and sports federations.

6. CONCLUSIONS

1. Psychological strength is one of the essential factors contributing to better sports performance and the ability to deal with competitions.
2. Good sports media helps to improve the self-confidence of athletes as well as decrease stress.

3. The combination of psychological strength and sports media is an ongoing process of increasing the performance level.
4. It is essential to increase media literacy among the athletes to prevent the negative discourse manipulation.

Recommendations

1. Establish training programs that will develop psychological resilience among athletes.
2. Motivate the sports media in a positive conversation that favours the athletes.
3. Enhance the collaboration between coaches and the media to facilitate performance.
4. Introduce the issue of psychological resilience and sports media into the study plan at the faculties of physical education and sports science.

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