

An Analysis of the Effects of Social Support on the Performance of Elite Paralympic Athletes

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Abstract

Athletes that are physically challenged or disabled can compete internationally and display their sporting abilities at the Paralympic Games. People with impairments can live better lives thanks in large part to sports (Nagoor Meera Abdullah, 2020). The ultimate objective of this ethnographic study is to create a framework for the development of social support for elite Paralympic athletes in order to promote excellence and athlete performance. The study will investigate and analyse in-depth the experiences of social support and challenges faced by elite Malaysian Paralympic athletes. Acknowledging the benefits of this assistance, it is intended to collaborate in order to establish an environment that is inclusive, empowering, and supporting, guaranteeing that each Paralympic athlete has the chance to realise their full potential.

Keywords: Social Support, Performance Outcomes, Paralympic Elite Athletes.

Background

People with disabilities in Malaysia started participating in sports (OKU) in 1962. In 1962, after meeting Ludwig Guttmann to form a powerlifting squad, H.R.M. Storey returned to Malaysia, marking the start of his international engagement. At the 19th International Stoke Mandeville Games in 1970, Malaysia was represented by a team made up of an athlete and a manager. Weightlifting athlete Mariappan Perumal became the first Malaysian to win a medal in the Paralympic Games, winning a bronze in Seoul, South Korea, in 1988. When he competed at the 1992 Barcelona Paralympic Games, he once more contributed a bronze medal in the same sport (National Sports Vision, 2030).

The growth of national sports is a major concern for the Malaysian government. According to the 2017 Budget Overview, the government has allotted up to RM 70 million for the Elite Sports Podium Development Programme, which aims to train athletes for international competitions, and up to RM 54 million for the Athlete Development Programme. It also consists of the Paralympic Athlete Preparation Programme and the Athlete Preparation Programme. This demonstrates unequivocally that the nation's performance is still uneven. Consequently, a player's performance in an athletic event is frequently correlated with social

and psychological support systems. When determining whether a competitor will succeed or fail, social support is a critical determinant. It has been acknowledged that social support and social support variables contribute to success in addition to physical, technical, and tactical talent (Dahlan & Muhamad, 2017). The challenge of producing competitive athletes who are comparable to international athletes is seen as increasingly important because many countries have increased the potential of athletes to compete in world-class tournaments (Wahid, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to have capable and competent coaches to guide athletes to improve the performance of Paralympic elite athletes.

As far as we are aware, this achievement would not be possible without the coaches' hard work in helping the athletes develop and perform to the best of their abilities. Coaches have a huge role, especially in sports for people with disabilities, as they are not only in charge of an athlete's performance but also of their overall development, which includes their personal, physical, and mental growth, in addition to helping them perform better. The role of a Paralympic top athlete coach is complicated since it calls for the aptitude and know-how to give athletes from different backgrounds methodical training to advance their abilities and performances when needed. In order to help the athlete succeed in the sport he plays, the coach has a tremendous deal of responsibility for helping the athlete reach his full potential. The deterioration of a player's performance occurs due to the player's own psychological factors such as lack of motivation, often losing focus, blood rushing, and lack of confidence in the player's own skills. In addition, social and psychological support in sports emphasizes the analysis of human behavior in different sports settings by focusing on aspects of mental performance (William, 2010). Social factors involving family and friends strongly influence people with disabilities to participate in physical activities (Abdullah et. al., 2022).

A long-term plan must be put into place in order to produce Paralympic athletes who are stronger psychologically, physically, mentally, and competitively—on par with the world's top athletes. This is why all sports, but especially the Paralympic ones, play such an important role in the lives of athletes because they are not only accountable for their performance but also for their overall development, which includes their personal, physical, and mental growth as well as their performance in their chosen sport (Muhamad et al., 2018). Many variables affect an athlete's performance at different levels, both as an individual and as a team. Therefore, research must be done to address the issue of athletes' performance, which is still below par. Since the athlete has an internal component, the researcher will choose which social support factor is best for affecting the elite athlete's psychological performance.

Description of the Study

This ethnographic study's main objective is to thoroughly investigate and analyse the difficulties and social support experiences of elite Malaysian Paralympic athletes. The study's ultimate goal is to create a framework for the growth of social support for elite Paralympic athletes, which will promote excellence and athlete performance.

The goal of the study is to provide a conceptual framework for the impact of elite Paralympic athletes' social support on performance outcomes. The goals of the investigation are as follows

- i. Exploring forms of social support for elite Malaysian Paralympic athletes.
- ii. Identifying key sources of social support that positively impact the performance of elite Paralympic athletes.

- iii. Identify the challenges and obstacles faced by elite Paralympic athletes in receiving social support and how they overcome them.
- iv. Provide guidance and a conceptual framework for the development of more effective support programs for them.
- v. Be a reference to other researchers interested in conducting research either in the same field or different fields.

As recommended by Sands (2002), this study is qualitative and employs an ethnographic method as a scaffolding study. When collecting data through qualitative methods of ethnography, the researcher can take part as a participant in addition to conducting interviews, taking images, videos, field notes, and questionnaires. The primary focus of ethnography is to record or personally experience an event through the observation and interviewing of connected parties (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2007).

In order to gather qualitative data, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were carried out with elite Paralympic athletes who have participated in a variety of tournaments and Paralympic athlete coaches who lead teams during contests. Through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, the researcher uses triangulation.

Next, Nvivo software and paper and pen were used together with the theme analysis method to analyse the qualitative data. While the researcher classified the findings of observations using field notes for observational data, it was utilised to extract codes, sub-themes, and primary themes from the transcripts of the interviews.

Population and Sample

Lebar (2022) asserts that the primary instrument in the study, and the one in charge of the entire data gathering and analysis process, is the qualitative researcher.

The actual study will comprise twenty (20) informants, including the Paralympic Centre of Excellence, Kg Pandan, and thirteen (13) elite Paralympic athletes and seven (7) Paralympic coaches. Using purposive sampling, the researcher will choose informants from among elite Paralympic athletes and Paralympic coaches.

Data Collection Procedures

The investigator will conduct a structured interview protocol including seven (7) Paralympic coaches, who hold a teaching qualification certificate in sports at different levels, and thirteen (13) Paralympic athletes who have competed in different tournaments.

To help the researcher analyse the areas that needed improvement, the interview data was recorded utilising a mobile phone tape recording. To ensure that the interview stays on topic, the researcher will craft better interview questions by concentrating solely on the goals and research questions. The duration of each interview will vary depending on how many questions the informant is asked, ranging from thirty to sixty minutes.

In order to ensure that the ethics of the research are upheld and that the goal of the study is welcomed with open arms, the researcher explained her ethical beliefs to the research informants prior to conducting an interview with the research participants. The informant must be given a clear explanation of the study's aim by the researcher, who should also allow the informant to choose the format of the interview and respect their sensitivities, particularly during it (Creswell, 2012). To obtain a clear understanding, the researcher must, therefore, select study informants whose experiences align with the requirements of the research topic. As to Creswell (2007, 2013), the process of "bracketing" or "epoche" necessitates the researcher to remain impartial and unrestricted in their exploration to

discover novel insights. The researcher decided not to reveal the identity of the informant in order to address ethical concerns in this study. Ensuring the safety and confidentiality of informants is contingent upon transparency in qualitative research practices. Additionally, the informant gave the researcher permission to perform each interview as part of the data collection process. Because it entails interpersonal engagement to gather information involving confidentiality and consent that must be made clear before the data is obtained, the interview that the researcher will perform with the informant includes an ethical component. However, the researcher must address certain ethical issues prior to the interview in order to collect high-quality data.

Study Requirements

This research will benefit several parties as follows

- i. As a reference to relevant parent bodies, namely the Ministry of Youth and Sports (KBS), the Malaysian Paralympic Council (MPM) and the National Sports Council (MSN). Be able to make long-term and short-term training plans and programs to produce professional athletes and coaches in addition to setting goals, objectives and strategies in sports participation. This is so because sports are believed to be able to increase the spirit of unity across the boundaries of age, race and belief.
- ii. As a guide and input to researchers who are interested in studying the coaching process, as a highlight of their literature for their future research.
- iii. Helping and giving ideas to coaches in particular to identify and understand Paralympic sports elite athletes in achieving performance.
- iv. Provide useful input to families, coaches and teammates in supporting elite Paralympic sports athletes so that they can improve their performance throughout their active participation in sports.

Conclusion

Social support has a big impact on where elite Paralympic athletes end up and how successful they are. It is evident from the examination of their experiences that this element influences athletes' performance favourably in addition to their emotional state. Support from friends, family, and professional support teams are essential components of the journey for Paralympic athletes, who frequently face significant physical and mental challenges. Athletes can overcome challenges and succeed when they have emotional and motivational support, and long-term performance is bolstered by physical assistance like training and medical attention. The existence of family becomes crucial in this situation. Family members' trust and support serve as a basis for self-assurance and a spirit of competition. Peers are crucial in helping athletes develop their identities and in creating a supportive atmosphere for their development. Athletes have access to the tools and knowledge they need when they have a professional support staff comprising technical support personnel, coaches, and sports medical specialists.

To guarantee that every athlete receives care that is comprehensive and tailored to their specific needs, support systems must be reinforced and enhanced. The difficulties in creating more effective policies and assistance initiatives are brought up by this research. It's critical to raise public knowledge of Paralympic competitors' realities in order to foster a more accepting and optimistic mindset. We can assist debunk misconceptions and provide possibilities for these athletes to receive support by fostering a more understanding community.

To sum up, this study offers a thorough understanding of the role that social support plays in guiding and enhancing the performance of elite Paralympic athletes. Acknowledging the benefits of this assistance, we can collaborate to provide a motivating, welcoming, and encouraging atmosphere, guaranteeing that each Paralympic competitor has the chance to realise their full potential.

There will be an implementation of a conceptual framework for the social support of elite Paralympic athletes. The results of this study are anticipated to have implications for elite Paralympic athletes' social support systems, particularly in relation to their emotional development. It is believed that elite athletes require positive emotional experiences to boost their self-esteem and motivation. In order to attain appropriate emotional development in line with their performance, Paralympic elite athletes require help in order to feel worthwhile, confident, and capable. Furthermore, it is intended that this study would help the Malaysian Paralympic Association focus on developing ways to increase player engagement at different levels, as well as identifying young players' talent and choosing instructors.

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