PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS IMPROVES LIFE SKILLS

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Life skills are those skills that enable us to succeed in the environments we live (Danish et al., 1992; Danish, 1995). Sports could be proved a suitable field for teaching life skills. Sports experience can be designed in such a way that sport participants can transfer what is learned to other domains such as school, home and/or workplace. The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of a psychological skills training (PST) program designed to improve children’s goal setting, problem solving and positive thinking skills.

The sample consisted of 40 female volleyball players (mean age = 11.47, SD=. 58) practicing in two different teams. One team was assigned as the experimental group (n=19) and followed the PST intervention for 8 weeks, while the second team served as the control group (n=21). For the 8-week period, both teams followed the same volleyball practice programme. In addition to regular volleyball practice, the experimental group also practiced activities including personal goal setting in a specific volleyball skill, guidelines for achieving these goals, methods for solving problems during volleyball practice and tips for positive thinking. Our primary research objective was to determine whether participation in the PST program would have any impact on outcome variables related to positive youth development. These variables included knowledge and self-efficacy beliefs on personal goal setting, problem solving and positive thinking. Knowledge was measured using a 10-item multiple-choice test evaluating knowledge of how to set goals, solve problems and think positive. Self-efficacy beliefs for the same variables - goal setting, problem solving; positive thinking - were assessed using a previously validated 15-item questionnaire. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaires before the intervention, immediately after, and two-month after the conclusion of the intervention.

Repeated measures ANOVA revealed significant group by assessment interactions for both, the knowledge test (F(2,60) = 36.29, p<001) and the self efficacy beliefs tests (F(2,60) =11.11, p<001). Post-hoc analysis indicated that for the experimental group knowledge about goal setting, problem solving and positive thinking improved significantly (F (i21) = 55.47, p<001) as a result of the PST intervention. Moreover, this positive impact was maintained two months after the intervention (Figure 1). Self efficacy beliefs on the same variables also improved significantly as a result of the intervention (F(i21) -21.18, p<.001), but a significant decrease of the score two months after (F(i21) = 22.98, p<.001), indicates that this positive impact was not sustained (Figure 2).

The results of the present study showed that a psychological skills development program implemented through volleyball practice improved participants’ knowledge on how to set goals, solve problems and think positive. The short-term effects regarding, self-efficacy beliefs indicate the need to regularly practice these life skills in order to maintain high levels of self-efficacy. Overall, it could be suggested that sports practice, if properly designed, can provide the ideal setting for developing life skills.

REFERENCES