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Artículo Científico

Evaluación de una Intervención Psicoterapéutica Basada en Psicología Positiva sobre el Bienestar Psicológico de Jóvenes Futbolistas: Un Estudio Cuasi-Experimental.

Evaluation of a Psychotherapeutic Intervention Based on Positive Psychology on the Psychological Well-being of Youth Footballers: A Quasi-Experimental Study.

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Resumen

El presente estudio cuasi-experimental investigó los efectos de una intervención psicoterapéutica basada en Psicología Positiva sobre el bienestar psicológico de los jugadores juveniles del club Plaza Amador sub-18. La intervención, diseñada para fortalecer la autoaceptación y el crecimiento personal, fue evaluada utilizando la Escala de Bienestar de Ryff antes y después de su implementación. Participaron diez jugadores jóvenes, quienes experimentaron talleres y actividades enfocadas en mejorar las relaciones interpersonales y el desarrollo personal. A pesar de las expectativas optimistas, los resultados post-intervención no revelaron cambios estadísticamente significativos en los puntajes de bienestar psicológico. Este hallazgo sugiere que, aunque la intervención fue bien recibida y mostró tendencias positivas, su impacto en los indicadores medidos de bienestar psicológico no fue significativo. El estudio resalta la complejidad de abordar el bienestar psicológico en jóvenes deportistas y subraya la importancia de investigar métodos más efectivos para mejorar la salud mental en este grupo demográfico.

Palabras clave: psicología deportiva, bienestar psicológico, psicología positiva, jugadores de fútbol juvenil, intervención psicoterapéutica, estudio cuasi-experimental

Abstract

The present quasi-experimental study investigated the effects of a psychotherapeutic intervention based on Positive Psychology on the psychological well-being of the youth players from the Plaza Amador under-18 club. The intervention, designed to strengthen self-acceptance and personal growth, was evaluated using Ryff's Well-Being Scale before and after its implementation. Ten young players participated and experienced workshops and activities focused on improving interpersonal relationships and personal development. Despite optimistic expectations, post-intervention results did not reveal statistically significant changes in psychological well-being scores. This finding suggests that, although the intervention was well received and showed positive trends, its impact on the measured indicators of psychological well-being was not significant. The study highlights the complexity of addressing psychological well-being in young athletes and underlines the importance of researching more effective methods to improve mental health in this demographic group.

Keywords: sport psychology, psychological well-being, positive psychology, youth soccer players, psychotherapeutic intervention, quasi-experimental study

Introduction

The field of sports psychology has become increasingly important, particularly in its focus on the relationship between psychological well-being and athletic performance. This discipline explores how psychological factors influence sports performance and how physical activity impacts an individual's overall well-being (S.J.H Biddle, 2015). Research in this area has underscored the significance of mental health for athletes, pointing to a critical need for effective interventions, especially for young athletes (Daniel Parnell, 2017).

Some young athletes are already high-performance competitors in their respective sports, while others stand out as promising athletes compared to their peers. In both cases, these young athletes put in much effort, dedicating many hours most days of the year. They must also balance their studies and other age-appropriate activities. Many of these young athletes even drop out of school to focus solely on sports (Buceta, Mi hijo es el mejor y ademas es mi hijo, 2015). These challenges can negatively impact their psychological well-being, manifesting in symptoms of anxiety, stress, and, in some cases, depression. Milagros Ezquerro, in 2006 and 2010, addressed the challenges of clinical psychology in sports, emphasizing the need better to understand disorders and their relationship to sports performance. She also highlighted the importance of defining specific diagnostic criteria to distinguish between what is expected and pathological in the high-performance athlete population (Garcìa-Noblejas, 2016)

Given that psychological well-being is essential for quality of life and sports performance, it is crucial to address psychopathological disturbances. In some cases, athletes' psychopathological disturbances may arise from causes unrelated to their sports activities, such as depression due to the death of a family member. However, in other cases, these disturbances can result from a state of vulnerability or factors related to their sports activities or the environment surrounding them (Buceta, Psicologìa Clìnica en el Deporte de Competiciòn, 2015)

According to Pineda-Espejel, Morquecho-Sánchez, and Gadea-Cavazos (2018), the validity of the Multidimensional Perfectionism in Sport Scale-2 highlights the need to evaluate its psychometric properties in different samples of athletes (Pineda-Espejel, Morquecho-Sánchez, & Gadea-Cavazos, 2018)

In a study offering an alternative perspective in sports psychology, Soto-Lagos, Pozo-Gómez, and Romero-Álvarez (2020) emphasize the importance of considering all social, cultural, and historical contexts involved in sports practice (Soto-Lagos, Pozo-Gómez, & Romero-Álvarez)

Internationally, FIFA has launched a campaign called #REACHOUT, designed to raise awareness about mental health symptoms and encourage people to seek help. This support is being achieved with the help of retired and current football players who emphasize the importance of mental health awareness (FIFA, 2021).

In line with this, FIFPRO launched its program to raise awareness about mental health among football players under the slogan "Are you ready to talk?" Their research showed that up to 38% of football players experience some form of psychopathology during their careers. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of players facing mental health issues has increased (FIFPRO, 2021).

In a survey conducted in 2019, the majority of football players reported experiencing mental health symptoms and their negative impact on performance. Consequently, FIFPRO's Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Vincent Goutterbarge, requested that all player unions establish a network to identify and refer footballers for appropriate support from specialists (FIFPRO, 2021).

This study focuses on a psychotherapeutic intervention designed to improve the psychological well-being of the under-18 youth football players at Club Plaza Amador. Football, at the regional confederation level, comprises 35 associations, and Panama has 396 professional players, according to FIFA's professional football report in 2023. Since football has high physical and psychological demands and is one of the most widely practiced sports globally, it provides a relevant context for this research (FIFA, 2023).

Elite athletes practice high-performance sports, whether they are young or more experienced. Young athletes engage in activities to prepare for elite levels or stand out in their age group, which can also be considered high-performance (Buceta, Psicologìa del deporte de alto rendimiento, 2020).

Psychological intervention in sports, especially football, is increasingly becoming a normalized demand. The psychological aspect of sports training, being relatively recent, is rapidly being incorporated to help efficiently manage all aspects of football training (David Peris-Delcampo, 2018).

The need to prevent psychopathological disorders makes psychological work a fundamental part of an athlete's training, encompassing various aspects of the player with the primary objective of neutralizing the apparent risks that competition entails. This psychological work can optimize athletes' performance and prevent

mental health issues. Furthermore, preserving athletes' health also positively impacts their performance potential, helping them achieve the psychological balance necessary to perform at their best. To achieve it, therapeutic strategies and procedures commonly used in psychology must be adapted to the needs and circumstances of each athlete (Buceta, Psicologìa Clìnica en el Deporte de Competiciòn, 2015).

The intervention is based on the principles of Positive Psychology, an approach explained by Nansook Park (2013), citing Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000). This modern approach to psychology studies what makes life worthwhile, analyzing what goes well from birth to death. It examines positive and optimal experiences where people give their best. The scientific evidence of positive psychology aims to contribute to a scientific and balanced understanding of human experience, helping individuals build healthy, productive, and meaningful aspects of life and repair imbalances.

Based on the considerations above, as human beings, we experience a series of highs and lows that result in peaks and deep valleys. Positive psychology acknowledges the suffering humans may endure. Its balanced proposition states that both the good and the bad are fundamental, and psychologists should pay attention to both (Nansook Park, 2013).

Pursuing psychological well-being in sports is one of the most essential objectives today, as reflected in studies on the benefits of sports and physical activity for health (Rebeca Liberal, 2014).

Psychological well-being is perceived as a pleasant state related to the balance of our organism. The construct of psychological well-being is multidimensional, encompassing physical, psychological, and social aspects, and it refers to what Seligman in 2003 called Positive Psychology (Rebeca Liberal, 2014).

The objective of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a psychotherapeutic intervention on the psychological well-being of these young athletes. The hypothesis was that such an intervention would significantly improve their psychological well-being, measured through psychometric scales established by The Psychological Well-Being Scale designed in 1995 and adapted and validated by Diaz in 2006 (Rebeca Liberal, 2014). A quasi-experimental design with pretest and posttest measurements was used to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of psychotherapeutic interventions on the well-being of young athletes.

This study's results can potentially inform and improve the practices of coaches, sports psychologists, and other professionals working with young athletes. By highlighting the importance of addressing psychological well-being, this study contributes to developing a parallel between sports and life, as argued by Romero, García-Más, and Brustad (2009) cited by (Rebeca Liberal, 2014).

During the search conducted in our country for studies similar to our knowledge, this study was pioneered in Panama.

Methodology

A longitudinal quasi-experimental design articulated through a pretest-posttest measurement methodology was chosen to investigate the therapeutic effects of a psychotherapeutic intervention accurately focused on Positive Psychology constructs on the psychological well-being of young athletes in the football context. Based on cognitive-behavioral strategies and techniques for strengthening internal resources, such as self-efficacy, emotional resilience, and optimizing flow states, this intervention was directed at 10 Plaza Amador U18 youth team members. The demographic and sports characteristics of the participants, including age, football experience, and other relevant factors, were recorded.

The selection of a quasi-experimental design was driven by the intention to approximate experimental rigor within the contextual and ethical limitations inherent in the sports domain, allowing for the systematic evaluation of pre- and post-intervention changes in specific psychological dimensions. This evaluation was carried out using standardized and validated psychometric instruments within sports psychology, such as the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Inventory and the Brunel Mood Scale (BRUMS), ensuring objectivity and reliability in measuring the constructs of interest. The quantitative analysis of the variations in the scores obtained will allow for inferring the efficacy of the intervention, contributing to the body of knowledge on effective psychotherapeutic practices in optimizing the performance and well-being of young athletes.

Psychorapeutic Intervention

Positive psychology was used, focusing on self-acceptance, personal growth, and strengthening interpersonal relationships. The sessions, which included workshops and group activities, will be detailed, as well as the duration and frequency of these sessions.

Statistical Analysis

The Shapiro-Wilk test is used to determine the adherence to normality of the data distribution. Confirming this premise is crucial to validate the application of subsequent parametric techniques. Consequently, the paired sample Student's t-test will be implemented to compare the mean psychological well-being scores before and after the intervention. This test will provide statistical evidence on the existence of significant changes in the psychological well-being of the participants. Additionally, effect size measures, specifically Cohen's d, will be calculated to estimate the magnitude of these changes, offering a quantitative perspective on the efficacy of the intervention. A repeated measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) will also be conducted to evaluate statistically significant differences in psychological well-being scores across multiple time points.

Ethical Procedures and Informed Consent

The quasi-experimental study ensured ethical adherence through the informed consent of the participants, following strict guidelines to protect their rights. Precise inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to select Panamanian football players aged 15 to 18, ensuring a representative sample for the research.

Results

Pretest and Post Test.

Tables 1 and 2 present the quantitative results of the pretest and posttest, respectively, illustrating the variations in the participants' psychological well-being due to the intervention. These tables facilitate the comparative descriptive statistical analysis of well-being measures before and after the implemented program, as shown in Table 3

Table 1: Pretest Evaluation and Well-being Level of Each Player.

Pre test each Player																		
	Player 1		**Player 2**		**Player 3**		**Player 4**		**Player 5**		**Player 6**		**Player 7**		**Player 8**		**Player 9**		**Player 10**	
Dimensiones	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**
Self-Acceptance	21	Medium	31	High	26	Medium	24	Medium	26	Medium	24	Medium	29	High	24	Medium	24	Medium	27	High
Environmental Mastery	18	Medium	22	Medium	27	High	16	Low	19	Medium	31	High	27	High	22	Medium	22	Medium	24	Medium
Positive Relations	14	Low	31	High	21	Medium	20	Medium	24	Medium	14	Low	22	Medium	21	Medium	21	Medium	20	Medium
Personal Growth	23	Medium	39	High	31	Medium	26	Medium	35	High	29	Medium	29	Medium	27	Medium	27	Medium	28	Medium
Autonomy	17	Low	37	High	24	Medium	24	Medium	34	Medium	26	Medium	33	Medium	22	Low	22	Low	28	Medium
Purpose in Life	22	Medium	35	High	28	High	28	High	31	High	28	High	31	High	28	High	28	High	27	High

Psychological well-being grade Pre-intervention										
	Player 1	**Player 2**	**Player 3**	**Player 4**	**Player 5**	**Player 6**	**Player 7**	**Player 8**	**Player 9**	**Player 10**
Range	**115**	**195**	**157**	**138**	**169**	**152**	**171**	**144**	**151**	**154**
Level	Low	Elevated	High	Moderate	High	High	High	High	High	High

Table 2: Posttest Evaluation and Well-being Level of Each Player

Post test of each Player																				
	Player 1		Player 2		Player 3		Player 4		Player 5		Player 6		Player 7		Player 8		Player 9		Player 10	
Dimensiones	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**	**Σ**	**Level**
Self-Acceptance	23	Medium	30	High	30	High	27	High	29	High	30	High	30	High	23	Medium	25	Medium	24	Medium
Environmental Mastery	20	Medium	26	Medium	25	Medium	22	Medium	25	Medium	25	Medium	30	High	20	Medium	17	Low	25	Medium
Positive Relations	22	Medium	24	Medium	21	Medium	19	Medium	20	Medium	17	Low	25	Medium	20	Medium	24	Medium	20	Medium
Personal Growth	32	High	35	High	31	Medium	29	Medium	29	Medium	34	High	31	Medium	24	Medium	29	Medium	31	Medium
Autonomy	24	Medium	34	Medium	24	Medium	39	High	33	Medium	26	Medium	36	High	24	Medium	24	Medium	24	Medium
Purpose in Life	24	Medium	31	High	29	High	31	High	27	High	31	High	30	High	25	Medium	25	Medium	27	High

Psychological well-being grade Post-intervention										
	Player 1	**Player 2**	**Player 3**	**Player 4**	**Player 5**	**Player 6**	**Player 7**	**Player 8**	**Player 9**	**Player 10**
Range	**145**	**180**	**160**	**167**	**163**	**163**	**182**	**136**	**144**	**151**
Level	High	Elevated	High	High	High	High	Elevated	Moderate	High	High

Table 3: Descriptive Comparisson

Statistic	Pretest	Post Test
Mean	153.90	159.10
Standard Error	6.82	4.81
95% CI Lower Limit	138.47	148.22
95% CI Upper Limit	169.33	169.98
5% Trimmed Mean	153.90	159.10
Median	153.00	161.50
Variance	464.99	231.21
Standard Deviation	21.56	15.21
Minimum	115.00	136.00
Maximum	195.00	182.00
Range	80.00	46.00
Interquartile Range	22.00	19.50
Skewness	0.15	0.09
Kurtosis	0.06	-1.04

The analysis of the results reveals a significant improvement in the players' psychological well-being, evidenced by several key statistical indicators. Initially, there is an observed increase in the mean scores, rising from 153.90 in the pretest to 159.10 in the posttest, reflecting a generalized improvement among the participants. This progress is accompanied by a notable reduction in the variability of the scores, with decreases in both variance and standard deviation, suggesting greater consistency in the players' performance.

Additionally, the confidence interval for the mean narrowed in the posttest, indicating increased precision in estimating the population mean. Furthermore, the range of scores experienced a reduction, implying less extreme variability. Finally, adjustments in the skewness and kurtosis values point to changes in the distribution of the scores following the intervention.

These findings collectively indicate an improvement in the players' psychological well-being, highlighting greater consistency in their scores in the posttest compared to the pretest.

Shapiro-Wilk Test

The evaluation of the normality of the scores using the Shapiro-Wilk test revealed that the data do not significantly deviate from a normal distribution for both the pretest and posttest. Specifically, the pretest yielded a W statistic of 0.972 and a p-value of 0.911, while the posttest showed a W statistic of 0.953 and a p-value of 0.710. These p-values, above the established threshold of 0.05, do not provide sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis of normality in the score distributions for both measurements.

Consequently, it is concluded that the pretest and posttest scores follow a normal distribution, meeting the requirements for implementing parametric statistical analyses that assume this normality condition in the data. This characteristic of the score distribution reinforces the validity of the selected statistical methods for the subsequent analysis of the intervention effects.

Student's T-Test and Pearson

Applying the paired sample Student's T-test revealed a T statistic of -1.088 and a p-value of 0.305 when comparing the mean psychological well-being scores of the players before and after the intervention. This p-value, exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.05, does not provide a statistical basis to reject the null hypothesis, indicating the absence of significant differences in the mean psychological well-being scores between the pretest and posttest.

The Pearson correlation applied to the pretest and posttest scores revealed a coefficient of 0.713 and a p-value of 0.021. This coefficient indicates a moderate to high positive correlation between the measurements, suggesting that players with high scores in the pretest tended to maintain high scores in the posttest, and those with low scores followed a similar pattern. The statistical significance of this correlation, highlighted by a p-value below the established threshold of 0.05, reinforces the interpretation that the relationship between the scores in both phases of the study is substantial and not attributable to chance.

Anova and Linear Regression

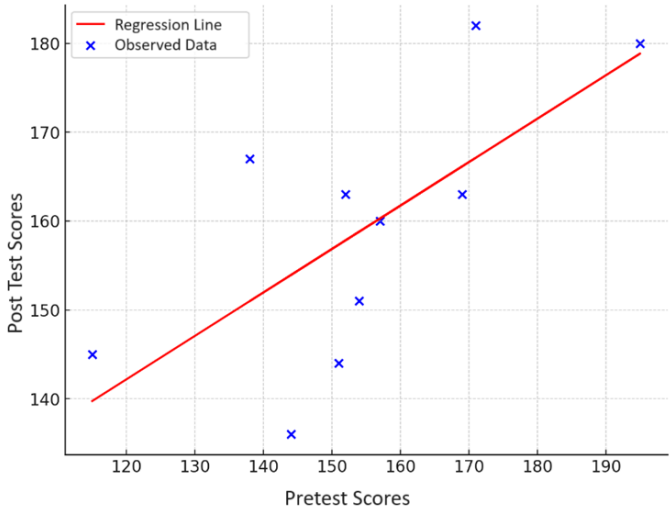
The analysis of variance (ANOVA) applied to the scores obtained in the pretest and posttest yielded the following results: the source of variation due to the condition (pretest versus posttest) showed a sum of squares of 135.2 with 1 degree of freedom and an F-statistic of 0.388, resulting in a p-value of 0.541. Additionally, the residual variability, which encapsulates the variation within groups, recorded a sum of squares of 6265.8 with 18 degrees of freedom.

On the other hand, the linear regression analysis conducted to explore the relationship between the pretest scores, used as the independent variable, and the posttest scores, considered as the dependent variable, provided interesting results. A coefficient for the intercept of 81.685 was determined, with a significant p-value of 0.017, indicating the statistical importance of the intercept. Additionally, the analysis yielded a coefficient of 0.503 for the pretest scores, with a p-value of 0.021, suggesting that a one-unit increase in the pretest scores is associated with an average increase of 0.503 points in the posttest scores, thereby demonstrating a statistically significant relationship. Figure 1 shows the results.

From the model's statistics perspective, the coefficient of determination R-squared reached a value of 0.509, indicating that approximately 50.9% of the variability observed in the posttest scores can be explained by the variations in the pretest scores. The adjusted R-squared, which adjusts based on the number of observations and the complexity of the model, was 0.447, providing a more accurate measure of the model's

goodness of fit. Finally, the model's F-statistic was 8.289, with a p-value of 0.0205, suggesting the overall statistical significance of the regression model. These results underscore the statistical validity of the model employed to assess the relationship between the pre- and post-intervention scores.

Figure 1. Relationship Between Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Players



The linear regression graph between the pretest and posttest scores shows a positive relationship, indicating that an increase in pretest scores is associated with an increase in posttest scores. The model revealed a significant intercept and a coefficient for the pretest scores, both statistically significant, suggesting that the intervention has an observable impact on the players' psychological well-being. The pretest scores explain approximately 50.9% of the variability in the posttest scores, with the model being globally significant. This underscores the effectiveness of the intervention and the linear relationship between the scores before and after it

Discussion

The results of the Student's T-Test suggest that the implemented interventions did not produce statistically significant changes in the measured psychological well-being. It is crucial to consider that sample size, score dispersion, and the study's statistical power could influence the ability to detect relevant variations.

The interpretation of these results focuses mainly on the F-statistic and the p-value obtained from the ANOVA test. An F-statistic of 0.388 indicates the relationship between the variation due to the intervention (between-group variation) and the natural variation or error (within-group variation). Additionally, a p-value of 0.541 suggests no statistically significant differences in the mean psychological well-being scores between the pretest and the posttest. According to the ANOVA analysis, this result implies that the observed changes in psychological well-being scores are not statistically attributable to the intervention.

The correlation and linear regression analyses also revealed a positive and consistent relationship in the well-being scores over time. This indicates that, although the intervention did not generate an immediate significant change in the scores, the psychological well-being levels of the players remained stable. It is important to recognize that interventions for psychological well-being may require a longer period to show significant changes and that their effects might be more subtle or manifest in the long term, which might not be fully captured in a short-duration quasi-experimental study.

Conclusion

Although the hypothesis tests (T-test and ANOVA) suggest no significant change in the average level of psychological well-being between the pretest and the posttest, the correlation and linear regression analyses indicate a positive and consistent relationship between the scores at the two time points. This can be interpreted as indicating that while the interventions or the passage of time did not have a statistically significant effect on the change in average psychological well-being scores, there is stability in the well-being scores of individuals over time.

Therefore, although no significant improvements in overall psychological well-being were observed, the consistency of the scores suggests that the players' well-being levels remain stable over time. Future research could explore other factors or interventions that might significantly influence the players' psychological well-being.

To be understood, one must know the population being worked with, especially adolescents who have immaturity in their cognitive aspects and are bombarded by information from an increasingly changing environment. This generates uncertainties for parents, guardians, or coaches, which psychologists must address to make the adolescent process manageable. Ignoring the processes involved at these ages is a shortcoming; thus, it is essential to consider normative and non-normative processes when working with adolescents.

In sports, many adolescents aim to advance to elite player status, play for the national team, or even play abroad to earn money, fame, and support their families, emphasizing the economic aspect. Due to the process carried out by the formative coach, all players place importance on school to ensure they graduate from high school, which is mandatory. This requirement helps shape a different player profile, making them capable of making better decisions in the face of conflicts or sports situations. Football has lacked this for many years, and many clubs have gradually changed their philosophy from having the best players to selecting those who best adapt both sportingly and socially.

There will always be exceptions to this philosophy, as many players come from areas with difficulties in terms of violence, drugs, family issues, economic challenges, and housing problems, making it difficult for them to succeed. Because of this, clubs are working on these aspects to professionalize players from an early formative age. Additionally, the federation establishes guidelines to ensure that we have better players and useful citizens and individuals for the country in the future.

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