

Application of Cognitive and Behaviour Framework Module in the Treatment for Mental Games among Golf Athletes: A Study of UUM National Golf Academy

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Abstract

This article discusses the continued effects of using the counselling approach module, ABC Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (ABC REBT) in reducing the psychological problems of golf athletes, especially athletes who are facing problem especially mental game and yips. Symptoms of this problem include anxiety and loss of self-confidence, shown through sweating and clumsy conditions when putting and chipping in critical situations. As a result, athletes face low self-confidence especially during major championships. In identifying the effectiveness of the module, the study conducted on the same athlete in previous years as respondents. This study also uses qualitative approach, involving three golf athletes. The views of coach who train them full time are also taken to support any changes in the results of the study. The theme of analysis and content analysis has been used. The findings show that the using of ABC REBT module treatment to overcome the mental game and the yips of golf athletes is effective in the long run. The result of theme analysis and content analysis reinforces the effectiveness of the ABC REBT treatment module on respondents. The result of this study are important in expanding the scope of counselling services in sports, and also proves the effectiveness of counselling approaches to athletes. Therefore, involvement of counselling practitioners in sports is also recommended. The article also illustrates the potential of cognitive and behavioural counselling approaches in reducing the problem.

Keywords: *Counselling, Treatment module, mental game, athletes.*

Introduction

The mental game problem refers to psychological problems faced by sports athletes that include personal problems, pressure in the competition, burn out, relationship problems with coaches and teammates and other problems involving the athlete's psychology^{1,2,3}. Mental game is a state of anxiety experienced by the athletes during certain manoeuvres in sport. It stems from the way the athletes responded to the difficulty level as well as the importance of movement or a shot that they will attempt. In addition, the over thinking symptoms

before starting the shot can also affect a player's skills and achievements. Thus mental game is considered to be a wide aspect in the field of sports. In golf specifically, mental game aspect is significant when a player is susceptible to the changes in the psychological aspects.

Therefore, a study entitled "The impact of ABC REBT brief counselling approach framework in addressing the mental game and the yips among golfers"⁴ has been conducted in order to improve the mental game treatment among golf athletes. In his study, the ABC REBT brief counselling approach framework was applied to a number of golf amateur athletes who were involved in a series of local and international golf competition. The study found that the approach has a significant impact in terms of control of the mental game that they face. At a glance, the results of the study are in line with the findings of other researchers who found that counselling approach can be implemented in the

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field of sports^{5,6,7}. This association is primarily caused by the psychological, mental and spiritual aspects of the athlete⁸.

Past Research: Among the earliest problems that affect athlete's psychological growth is the result of sports commercialization which started in the 1970s⁹. According to Scott⁹, athletes are faced with various problems such as lost self-confidence and mental stress, especially when it comes to unreasonable coaches' expectations. They are also faced with the pressure to meet the expectations of the parties who are sponsoring them. Thus, Scott¹¹ suggested that the problems faced by athletes such as stress and lost self-confidence are relatable with counselling services.

Hinkle¹⁰ estimated that there are around ten percent of student athletes who are associated with psychological problems at universities in the United States. Hinkle⁹ also attested that sports psychologists, different from sports counsellors focus on the athlete's performance. Sports counsellors on the other hand focus on the psycho-emotional problems experienced by athletes, by reviewing the emotional and psychosocial development of the athletes in a more comprehensive manner compared to sports psychologists. Such differences can be considered as the boundary between sports psychology and sports counselling fields. Further, a sports counsellor refines the athlete's problems and tries reducing them, while professionals in other fields may not have these capabilities⁹.

The cross field research on counselling and sports fields starts with the application of theory and counselling based approaches into the game aspects¹⁰. Among them are behavioural theories such as Solution Focused Behaviour Therapy and Therapy and Rational Emotive Behaviour¹⁰. Counsellors may not be an expert on the best *performance* for athletes, but the sports counsellors have their own method to handle their problems⁹. Sports Counsellor concentrates on the development of an athlete through lifestyle counselling, career and development programmes, as well as stress management.

Further to this, sports counsellor can engage in programmes such as problem prevention programmes, coping skills and competitive response, decision-making method, life management, therapeutic strategies and crisis management. However, that doesn't mean that sports counsellors are not involved with athletes' performances. Sports counsellors could provide services

that support both aspects indirectly⁹. Thus, sports counsellor sports need to be savvy or at least familiar with a specific type of sports activities of their clients¹¹.

One of the biggest challenges in the sports development is the lack of emphasis on a holistic approach in the aspect of training and development programmes for athletes³. More emphasis has been put on the development of skills, physical appropriateness, health and fitness aspects, and rewards and achievement¹¹. Unfortunately, serious attention in the athlete's psychological aspects is rarely given. This is due to the rapid development of immediate and continuous result-oriented sports industry that is expected by the stakeholders. They include the sponsors, the sports institutions or countries who expect that the athletes would collect medals from the tournaments in which they participate³.

For example, when the commercialization era started to enter the American sports industry, sponsored athletes were involved in several of psychosocial and psychological problems including the use of drugs and alcohol. These problems were believed to be the effect from high expectations from coaches, sponsors and fans⁸. It is estimated that ten percent of the athletes were involved in problems that requires counselling interventions⁷.

Thus, the development of counselling services in sports have a great potential to be further developed¹¹ and will continue to grow that can also imply the current developments of sports psychology is at the stage of maturity and will continue take into place in the long run¹². This fact is important to support the continuity of research on the field of counselling in sports.

Having said that, the effectiveness of the treatment counselling modules used to treat athletes, is still uncertain. Psychological problems such as mental game and yips also happen to athletes in other sports such as baseball and cricket¹³. Therefore, this study focuses to clarify these problems and results from this study can be used as input for programmes carried out by organisations which are involved in the development of sports in our country such as the National Sports Council (NSC) as well as other sports organizations.

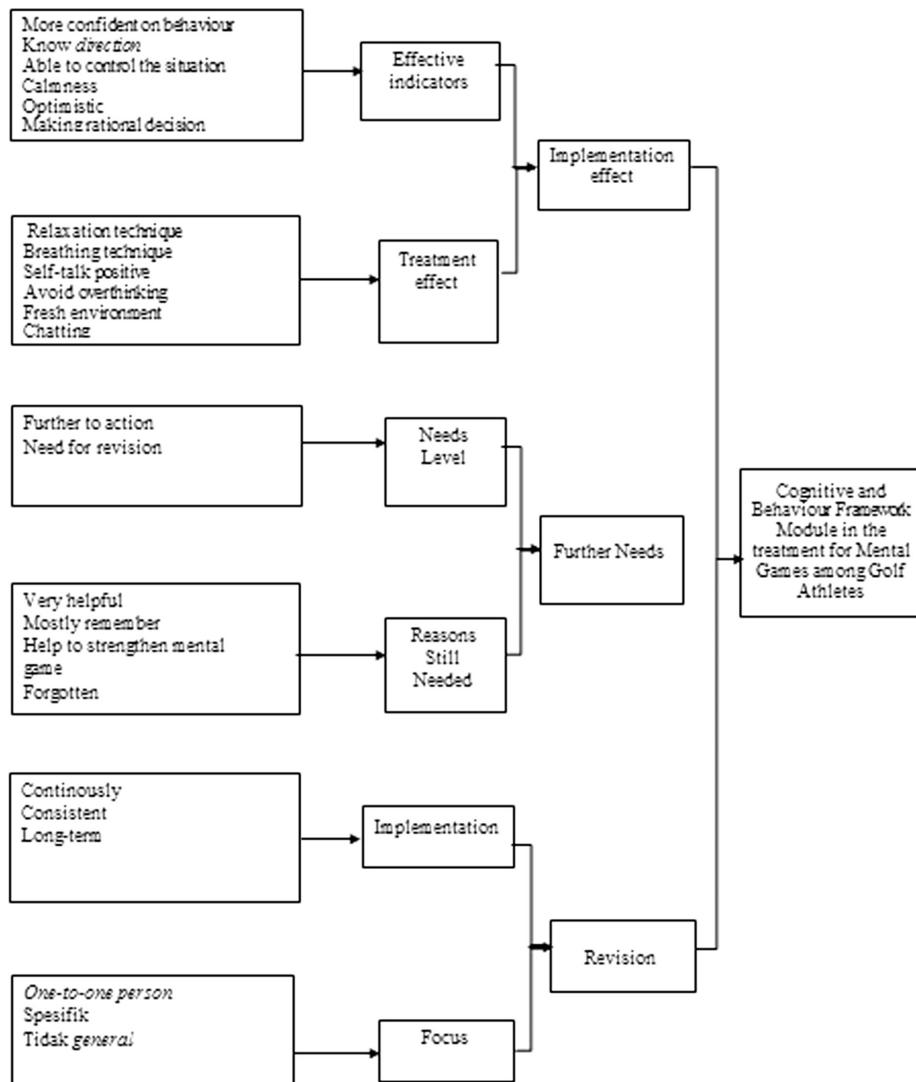
One of the sports that clearly require counselling services for their athletes is golf. Alike other sports that are either individually assessed or by teams, golf can be given great attention by nurturing hard work towards

continuous development. This includes strengthening the athletes' mental capacity. Efforts should be done to meet the needs in all aspects such as physical and skills, nutrition and psychological aspects of the athletes. In this study context of this study, efforts are taken in the form of the construction of an appropriate module in addressing the psychological aspects among athletes.

Methodology: Using a qualitative research design, this study has been conducted with four respondents from National Golf Academy, Universiti Utara Malaysia. This study uses the primary data from face to face interviews between researchers and respondents to collect key information as well as secondary data to support several findings obtained. After approval from the academy committee was obtained, the procedure for conducting semi-structured individual interviews began. The selected respondents were contacted to arrange

for the face-to-face interview session. The preparation of the protocol interview was guided by the previous research and recent literature on developing cognitive and behavior framework.

Findings: Three main components emerged from the thematic analysis on the data collected from the interviews between researchers and respondents. The themes are determined based on the effectiveness of the module implemented in the study conducted previously, the need to continue its implementation and any improvements needed to be done which can be implemented in the future. In addition, the components are also determined based on the frequency of the themes mentioned by the respondents. To make it easier to understand, the themes are arranged and depicted in a tree diagram as follows.



Tree Diagram on qualitative themes frequency

Discussion

Compared to other sports, golf is considered to be a fragile game¹⁴. Therefore, mastering a strong mental is very important in this game. The change of mood and game patterns can occur in split seconds, especially among amateur golf players. A popular term among golfers is 'lost my golf swing' which is a phenomenon that occurs among all amateur players. The importance of mental strength has been acknowledged by most major international golf instructors. There are two important things to master in golf are in the technical aspects and mental aspects¹⁴. According to him, great golfers like Hogan and Nicklaus are famous not only because of their golf skills but also their mental strength which always being portrayed in every major competition.

Based on the Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) theory, an individual emotional state depends on his belief, method of valuation, method of interpretation and response towards his surroundings, thus this therapy module requires a process capable of disputing all forms of thinking which leads to the client's irrational beliefs¹⁵. In addition, REBT also focus more on thinking, consideration and decision making which include judgment, analysis and actions¹⁵. Based on this, the focus in this therapy is highly suitable with the mental game problem which is closely related to the needs of the orientation of the athletes' rational and controlled thinking throughout the game period. This study focuses on the changes in intellectual understanding among players and sports concept changes and monitoring of after treatment effects¹⁶. In order to test the consistency of the module effectiveness applied in the study in 2014, this study was conducted to follow up and evaluate the implications of the use of the relevant module on athletes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the study of the psychology and counselling in sports is important in order to enhance the development of sports in Malaysia. The Malaysian sports industry is evolving in becoming an industry that can generate substantial income to the country¹⁶. Therefore, studies relating sports psychology is seen as important to support training in all sports categories¹⁷. National Sports Institute¹⁸ has also set their targets in helping athletes with mental stress problem by increasing the amount of counsellors in the field of sports. Similar with other sports, golf is also expanding with facing many opportunities and challenges of its own. Since golf is

played by individual player, golf is likely be able to bring the country chances to win medals at the Southeast Asian level or a higher level, for example in the 2016 Olympics. Nevertheless, golf has different challenges from other sports. Among others, the problems include those involving psychological aspects faced by the players which could easily affect their performance.

Golf is a game that is very fragile. The problems that are either due to a player's psychological aspects or non-psychology, such as climate, change can change the player's performance. Realizing that external factors cannot be controlled, thus, the control over internal factors especially in strengthening the psychological aspects of the player, must be prioritized. With this regard, efforts to overcome psychological problems such as mental game and yips need to be conducted. Previous studies including those using counselling approaches have proven that these problems can be treated. In this study, treatment using REBT approach has contributed good decisions on how mental problems and game yips can be reduced. Thus, this study becomes an effort that could help address the psychological aspects of sports players and contributes an added value towards other training programmes that the players participate in.

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Conflict of Interest: Nil

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