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PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF SPORTS INTERVENTIONS
ON MENTAL HEALTH: EXPLORING THE PERSPECTIVES
OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATORS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Isais Wellington Smith
Gamaliel Beltran
June 2011

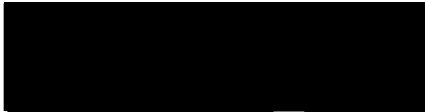
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Approved by:



Dr. Tom Davis, Faculty Supervisor
Social Work

6/7/11
Date



Dr. Rosemary McCaslin,
M.S.W. Research Coordinator

ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceived effectiveness of sports interventions on mental health, exploring the perspectives of professional educators. The study sample includes 6 coaches from different high schools including sports such as basketball, baseball, volleyball, and track and field. Coaches were voluntarily interviewed using a qualitative approach and classified into two groups, men and women. The results showed that sports and exercise are positively correlated with assisting athletes in the development of confidence, self-esteem, and problem solving skills, which could alleviate issues such as depression, anxiety, and other disorders. These findings indicate that the skills learned within an active sports environment can be developed to influence positive life skills and mental health.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take the time to acknowledge every member of my 2011 MSW cohort. You are a wonderful group of people and will carry on in this profession as a catalyst to change the world. I also have to acknowledge my E.A.R.T.H. members (Ro Tone, Mr. No, and Write Words) for your patience, support, and love. Tohn, Lei, Titan, and Miles- your smiles and your consistent display of love have helped me grow as a man. Mom, Dad, and Dani- you have helped me find my shine and have supported everything I do with love and blessings. Tia Miriam, Simon, and Chris- You have helped me find my true passion in sports and support all I do the same ways I support you. Jeffery, Norma, Jeffery Jr., Jaden, and Jacob- thank you for the love and supporting my every move in this program. Dr. Davis- Thank you for your time and mentorship throughout the program and thesis. You are truly one of the greatest professors I have ever encountered. Thanks. If there is anyone that I have left out in this acknowledgement, more than likely I have given you my appreciation in person. Thank you for the prayers, love, and support. May God continue to rain his

blessings on us and move us towards the direction of
success. Thank you.

Isais Smith

Dr. Davis "the man," 2011 MSW cohort.

Gamaliel Beltran

DEDICATION

First and foremost, this work is dedicated to the most high, who has blessed us with the knowledge and understanding to complete this project and program. I extend my appreciation to all the members of the Smith, Tobar, and Aguirre families. You have remained a true inspiration and have been a source of my strength at my most difficult times. Thank You.

Isais Smith

Dedicado a Dios y a mis padres quienes han fundado valor, amor, y determinación en mi vida y me han dado el privilegio de realizar el sueño que muchos desean. Gracias por el apoyo que me han concedido, por sus consejos, y por el empujo que he necesitado para llegar hasta este punto.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the overview of the problem is examined. Current practices used, policies, and social worker roles are discussed. The purpose for this study is outlined and the research method was addressed along with the significance of the project for social work.

Problem Statement

In the United States many adolescents suffer from multiple disorders such as depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and anxiety. Proel (2001) suggests that a social issue is at hand when the lower class will continue to grow substantially as a result of the economy downfall, which will contribute to be a growth of minors with disorders because of their environment. The disorders presented have strong correlations with others, which are of major concern for this population because of the extending effects that can arise from multiple disorders. According to Hammen (2009)

Depression is impairing and is associated with many problems, such as school difficulties and dropout, unwanted pregnancies, health problems, drug and

alcohol abuse and smoking, intimate partner violence, and problematic peer and family relationships, as well as anxiety, eating, and disruptive-behavior disorders. Tragically, it can also be fatal due to its association with suicide.

(p. 200)

Moreover, it is important to incorporate interventions and clinical support to assist clients in need of treatment to empower the aspects of recovery.

Current intervention methods which are utilized to help assist clients develop stronger mental health needs include cognitive behavior therapy (CBT), play therapy, group therapy, coping skills, problem solving, and social skill building. The social workers' roles with these clients are to empower individuals by engaging therapeutic interventions that are effective among the underprivileged, disadvantaged, and disenfranchised population.

The literature indicates sports as an exercise treatment modality helps improve minors' mental health and well being, and assists in the positive progression of coping with disorders. Sports and exercise are essential factors within the mental health setting, which

should be utilized to promote the aspects of policy and provide assistance in implementing the change process. The reflection of policies implemented, should focus on sports and exercise as an intervention in social work. Problem symptoms can be identified and diminished, which the utilization of active involvement and social successes of treatment could be used to help individuals, especially minors, with their disorders.

There are no clear policies that exist, which focus on the perceived effectiveness of sports interventions from the perspectives of professional educators, such as coaches. Thousands of these subjects directly interact with sports and exercise but have not been studied on their awareness of the outcome from the effects of mental health well being and sports as an exercise.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine sports interventions among professional educators and how sports as an exercise method can contribute to mental health well being. The underlying assumption of the research was to portray sports and exercise as a treatment for mental

health and how these interventions are underutilized in many social work settings.

Literature in the fields of psychology and psychosocial sport indicate that team sports and many sport interventions are effective in helping patients deal with issues like depression, anxiety, ADHD, and schizophrenia. According to Carless and Douglass (2008) methods of sports interventions are effective, which can be applied to social work settings involving individual therapy and group therapy, especially with children and transitional age youth who have a genuine interest in being active. Qualitative field research was conducted to thoroughly examine the importance of sports from the perspectives of coaches and players as the professionals directly involved. As explained by Morris (2006), "The aim is to develop holistic and comprehensive description and analyses of research topics. In this way, theories are developed, formulated, and tested by logical, self-aware reasoning" (p. 71).

The research involved 6 participants including many different coaches that are directly involved in various sports or exercise programs. A qualitative interview was conducted with each individual to investigate sports and

exercise perspectives of the participant and how these aspects may apply as a treatment modality in social work practice.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

Sports and exercise in many therapeutic environments may help individuals alleviate symptoms pertaining to depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, bi-polar, and many other mental health disorders. As expressed in many literature publications, sports based interventions and exercise have positive effects on physical and mental health well being. Although, sports are primarily viewed as an entertainment institution, their underlying effects can promote an increase in positive pro-social relationships with authority figures and peers, positive coping skills, a stronger sense of identity, and self-esteem. In most therapy settings, especially in social work, athletics and exercise is under-utilized. Moreover, to incorporate sports based interventions into therapy sessions could assist clients to properly deal with their difficulties through physical activity, while learning a multitude of positive skills.

Within the generalist model, this research involving sports and exercise reflected the implementation phase. It is argued that athletics should be implemented in therapy settings to help the client build self-esteem and coping skills, especially if the client exhibits an interest in athletics. This will help the social worker build upon the aspects of self-determination and empower the client towards the direction of recovery. Therefore, the research question will reflect a hypothesis, which expresses that sports based intervention is a successful mechanism in coping with mental health difficulties. The perspectives of the professional coaches examined the hypothesis and reasoning on a qualitative level.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter the advantages of sports in therapy will be discussed. Along with this, past systems that support the literatures findings with limitations and the furthering of improving the methods in which the results are obtained.

Benefits

Sports is an important institution in society because of its ability to openly involve individuals in a socially interactive atmosphere, which can reflect positive skill sets and assertive communication methods surrounding the game play. Although sports is often viewed as an aspect of entertainment, many current publications reference the utilization of sports based interventions in therapeutic settings as having positive effects on their participants. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2002), psychological effects of sports participation can be a beneficial aspect for many individuals that suffer from mental illnesses and other externalizing disorders like

depression, bi-Polar disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and schizophrenia. According to Lullo and Puymbroeck (2006), sports can provide opportunities for pro-social experiences and interactions, which can help clients, especially children with ADHD, boost self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-confidence. Lullo and Puymbroeck (2006) also suggest that the involvement in sports can also promote a sense of meaning, optimism, and hope to the lives of children with mental health issues, possibly assisting individuals to rediscover their sense of identity. Moreover, Hobart (2008) suggests that mental health professionals should be prescribing regular exercise routines for all clients due to the positive affects that exercise has on the brain. Exercise and physical activity can also be utilized as an aid with increasing focus and attention, and be very transformative to addiction recovery. Richardson, Faulkner, McDevitt, Skrinar, Hutchinson, and Piette (2005) also explain that, "Physical activity has the potential to improve the quality of life of people with serious mental illness through two routes- by improving physical health and by alleviating psychiatric and social disability" (p. 324). The aspects of recovery

within a social work setting reflect the notions of empowerment, self-determination and strength based approaches, which clients work on with clinical support to meet their treatment needs. According to Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Gottfried, and Larson (2010), "Empowerment means that groups or communities can act to prevent problems, gain or regain the capacity to interact with the social environment, and expand the resources available to meet their needs" (p. 414). Sports participation involves methods of open communication, trust, and cohesion, which can create close bonds and positive relationships that can contribute towards the aspects of learning problem solving methods and positive alternatives of dealing with problem behaviors exhibited by the mental health disorder. The aspects of praise and positive reinforcement as reflected by the strength-based approach in social work, are essential factors in aiding a client towards the direction of recovery. As stated by Popple and Leighninger (2008), "The strength perspective holds that it makes far more sense to focus on the strengths and abilities a client brings to working on a particular life difficulty than to stress the client's deficiencies" (p. 116). Utilizing the natural strengths

that a client has, as well as incorporating praise into sports participation, can increase the confidence and self-esteem levels of most individuals. Moreover, coping skills and problem solving behaviors become apparent as aspects of self-determination are considered within sports and exercise, helping the clients develop confidence and trust in themselves.

Most clients that face mental health difficulties are challenged with behaviors that reflect poor coping skills, poor problem solving, and even anti-social manners. The physical and mental benefits of athletics and exercise have the ability to promote a positive and active therapeutic effect on its participants. Carless and Douglas (2008) further state that, "A central focus of our ongoing interpretive research is the ways in which involvement in sport and exercise can contribute to the process of recovery in the context of serious mental illness" (p. 557). Carless and Douglas (2008) further their argument by expressing the importance of narratives and storytelling through the participation of sports, through which identity and a sense of self can be thoroughly developed. Similarly, Smith and Sparkes (2007) state that participation in sports or exercise helped

participants conceptualize narratives as both personal and social, which the response became a need for the individual to express their moments of strength and even moments of when they were able to overcome fear or adversity. Moreover, the personal aspects of telling a story include many distinctive circumstances that reflect positive aspects of identities, emotions, feelings, and motivations surrounding the active participation in a sport or exercise activity.

The therapeutic potential of athletics and exercise also contributes to building a stronger sense of confidence. Craft (2005) argues that, self-efficacy or the level of confidence that an individual feels to meet a challenge is considered to be one aspect, through which exercise can help reduce symptoms of depression. As indicated by Craft (2005) self-efficacy refers to the belief that an individual possess the skills and confidence to complete a task with a desired outcome obtained.

The participation in exercise and sports is an effective aspect, which enhances self-efficacy and can teach the individual to self-monitor behaviors, set goals, and utilize pro-social support to maintain desired

outcomes. As the participant processes the development of confidence, self-efficacy, and positive pro-social skills through the use of physical activity, exercise and sport can be utilized to help individuals cope with difficulties and ultimately empower recovery throughout all life situations. According to Nezhad and Besharat (2010), resilience and hardiness have a positive relationship with sport participation and psychological well-being. Higher levels of resilience appear to help athletes cope with stressors by expressing positive emotions, which helps to provide a psychological time-out. Moreover, the skills learned within the active participation of sports and exercise can influence positive coping skills and problem solving behaviors, which can influence making better choices in life.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The theories that guide past research for this topic are systems theory and social cognitive theory. As indicated by Turner (2006), Systems theory focuses on different methods that are holistic and tend to relate parts and the whole based on causality. Chelladurai (2005) states "organizations are open systems, in which

the whole is viewed through the interactions, interconnections, and interdependence of the parts as such relationships between the parts and the whole are influenced by the social, cultural, and economic conditions of the environment" (p. 138).

This theory takes into account the influence from an individual and the social environment. For example the literature review covers individuals with externalized disorder and how interaction with activities (sports as an exercise) impacts the way they live. With this theory the research focused on the welfare of this population along with positive and healthy relationship building is ultimately trying to understand how to transfer this knowledge on to a wider scale to improve mental health.

Social cognitive theory was also used with past research. This theory involves understanding social problems through a scope of individual psychology. The individual's behavior impacts the interaction with society. This theory targets social problems by using interventions through counseling on a one on one basis. It is applicable in the sports settings and was used in the literature to measure if the minors in a population

were able to learn from each other and benefit from their overall mental health.

The study will be conducted using systems theory in order to focus on the impact of the environment on individuals. The research, under this theory will use survey questions and interact directly with professional educators in order to gain insight into their perspectives on the impact sports as an exercise has on minors with externalized disorders. The researcher will use professional educators and sports as an exercise to examine if the relationship is beneficial in empowering minors towards bettering their overall mental health.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter outlines what the research will need to gather data for the study. Approaches to gathering data, tools, and subjects will be further elaborated.

Study Design

The focus of the study explored the perception of professional educators on sports as a form of intervention. The research method that was implemented in this study reflected a qualitative approach. The rationale for using this approach was to acquire a deeper understanding of sports through the perspectives of professionals and how this may apply to promoting positive mental health and well being. Interviews generated a comprehensive description of the many styles and forms of coaching that promote self-esteem, confidence, and identity. The hypothesis indicates that sports based interventions are perceived as successful tools in coping with mental health difficulties.

Sampling

Coaches in all sports play a vital and significant role in the organization, communication, and morale of most teams. It is necessary to understand the coach's perspectives on practicing methods of hard work and confidence as it positively relates to player's mental health. The coach as the head of the team has a responsibility for directing players and managing hard work ethics and confidence in the players and the game.

There were a total of 6 interviews collected consisting of many coaches from various sports in local high schools in the Riverside and San Bernardino areas. The sports that were explored include baseball, basketball, soccer, and track and field. The criteria for the coaches that were selected for the study were dependent on the sports that are mentioned. Although, there are no specific criteria of the coach, the total collection of data will be 6 coaches.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data that collected reflected the educators' points of view on sports as a potential intervention. The points of view, opinions, and comments were audio

recorded in a qualitative fashion. The instruments that were used in the interview were a series of questions, which were asked in order to obtain their points of views (Appendix A). The validity of the instrument that was used was acceptable because the questions that were asked are based on literature that has thoroughly explored the benefits of sports and mental health. The literature takes into account diversity and cultural aspects, and applies this to the studies that are being examined. The questions integrated in the research and the points of view from the educators as it pertains to their experiences were found. The coach's experience, expertise, and guidance of the game are the main attributes that directly affect the player's mental health. The players, being the main attractions of the game, are directly influenced by the coach's advice and plan, and expected to execute these aspects during practice and the game.

Some of the strengths presented were reflected from the validity of the questions that are presented. The questions have a substantial amount of research supporting them and they provided the educators with a

good amount of history, which provided each coach with a good background in answering the questions.

Within the research, the greatest limitation was not having players as participants to re-enforce the hypothesis. The players as a sample would of allowed a full understanding of the coach's influence and how it is applied in the lifestyles of the players, from the participants' perspectives.

Procedures

According to Morris (2008), "Data gathering for the post-positivist, includes interviews, observations of settings, and reviews of documents and social artifacts. Skilled questioning, active listening, focused observation, and disciplined reading will all facilitate the collection of valid data" (p. 95). The data in the research was directly gathered from coaches through qualitative interviews. The coaches were gathered by random selection from high school organizations and local sports teams in the community. The initial approach involved face to face communication to introduce the topic and build some rapport with the sample. The sample was notified of the research's hypothesis and given a

sample of questions that were asked during the interview. Moreover, the researchers and sample agreed on a date for the interview and stayed in contact via telephone when necessary. The questions that were provided for the coach's references included descriptive questions (See Appendix) that outlined the coach's experience and influence on the game and players involved. The coaches had a copy of the questions expected during the interview, and this allowed them to clarify in detail, the questions that reach the core of their perspectives. The bulk of the data was gathered through the recording process, where the interview between researchers and the coach was done through audio recording. During this process, the researchers asked the interviewee if it is okay to take additional notes to capture the true essence of the coach's belief in the subject. The data collection process also reflects a journal with multiple processes of the reactions, thoughts, and feelings of the experience from the interviewer.

Protection of Human Subjects

The confidentiality of the research is a very important aspect of the study, which outlines the safety

of information and anonymity of the participants. The research includes an informed consent (Appendix B) to reassure the interviewee that the knowledge will be used solely for the purpose of research. The coaches have all receive a copy of the informed consent form and given a detailed explanation of what will happen with the interview and recorded audio responses. All of the participants have a solid understanding of what was done with their statements and how they relate to the hypothesis of the study. On completion of the interview, a debriefing outline (Appendix C) was given to the coaches to further explain the research methods and express appreciation for their participation in the study.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process of this qualitative research study reflects the "Bottom-Up" approach. According to Morris (2008), a "Bottom-up" approach to analyzing qualitative data is a much more inductive, open-ended approach and is rooted in sociology" (p. 111). The most important aspect that was utilized in this study within the bottom up approach was the framework of open

coding. Morris (2008) explains that open coding involves a process, which analyzes data with a frame of mind that is open to all potential interpretations. Within the narrative of the interview, the most interesting segments was analyzed in detail and divided into chunks. This allows the narratives to be open to sensitizing and theoretical comparisons, which could validate the hypothesis of the study. Key words were handled with the most care and possibly put into specific categories that reflect the true essence of the study and hypothesis.

Summary

This chapter outlined the process that was needed in order to collect data. Further details explain whom the researcher was interviewing, the methods the researcher used, the tools, and some limitations that the study encounters.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The following tables represent findings from this qualitative study. The tables represent core themes that emerged in the qualitative interviews and were used to guide the detailed discussion of these of the next chapter.

Presentation of the Findings

Table 1. Ideas Mentioned by Respondents

Ideas Mentioned by Respondents
- accomplished getting better (3)
- bad outlet because parents wanted kids to over excel in their potential (1)
- being able to field the ball/ hands on involvement by the coach (2)
- because of the relationship built, players keep in touch even after the season (1)
- better status (1)
- body language (1)
- build self esteem and social skills (11)
- carry themselves different
- channel things to something different (2)
- coach=father figure (2)
- coach expects a 3.0 GPA (2)

Ideas Mentioned by Respondents
- collaboration between teachers and coaches (5)
- competition among team members is healthy (1)
- commitment (3)
- consequences (4)
- control his asthma mentally (1)
- coping mechanism (2)
- disagreements/competition (1)
- discipline (1)
- deals with anger in life (1)
- developing body = clearing the mind (2)
- effort in practice will determine opportunity in field (1)
- enforces no fighting (1)
- environment support like friends and family helping with resilience (2)
- experienced the impact of living in a low social economic status neighborhood (1)
- fundamentals are important (1)
- gain confidence (18)
- gain experience (1)
- handle many different things (1)
- hardiness = grit (1)
- having a better bonding experience/family (4)
- have each other's backs (3)
- help players/good humor (2)
- helps overcoming fears (2)
- helps make the adjustment (1)
- helping kids ignore the bad expectation (1)
- it can be difficult (1)
- in sports attitude helps the players have a positive view and makes them have social mannerisms (2)

Ideas Mentioned by Respondents
- keeps players out of trouble (1)
- learning from their experience (3)
- loyalty (2)
- maintaining a 2.0 is mandatory (1)
- more admirable to have success in sports the natural way versus steroids (1)
- more interactive (1)
- motivate players (1)
- no outlet can lead to gangs and drugs (1)
- overcoming things (1)
- positive encouragement (1)
- positivism (2)
- practice can be seen as a challenge (1)
- proud (1)
- reach a desired goal (2)
- sense of identity (2)
- sports helps with low social skills (3)
- sports helps with mental health issues (1)
- sports helps with motor skills (8)
- sports teachings transfers over into the classroom (1)
- sports transfers over into the school setting (1)
- stress getting better (5)
- they are there for each other (1)
- team members grow a good relationship with one another (2)
- teamwork (1)
- transfers into life (9)
- trust (5)
- using teamwork (5)
- weekly grade check by the coach (1)

Table 2. People Mentioned by Respondents

People Mentioned by Respondents
- athlete (1)
- coaches (35)
- family (1)
- father figure (3)
- guy named 'Weezy' (1)
- hippie (1)
- leader (1)
- mentor (2)
- mother (1)
- parent (1)
- peers (1)
- pitcher (1)
- pitching coach (1)
- players (9)
- single parent (2)
- team (3)
- youth (17)

Table 3. Places Mentioned by Respondents

Places Mentioned by Respondents
- basketball court (1)
- classroom (2)
- friends houses (1)
- home (1)
- in sports/field (9)
- school (6)
- society (1)
- workplace (2)

Table 4. Things Mentioned by Respondents

Things Mentioned by Respondents
- ball (2)
- bat (1)
- cage (1)
- chart (1)
- flagpoles (1)
- given a list (1)
- grade check list (3)
- iron mike (1)

Table 5. Core Themes Reduced from Data

Core Themes Reduced from Data
- positive reinforcement
- reduce stress
- self confidence
- self esteem/social skills
- team cohesion

The responses from all coaches were condensed to five themes. The ideas, people, places, and things mentioned will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Discussion

The qualitative interview process with each sample presented important insight that reflected key themes, which appeared to be apparent in the discussion of sports participation. Every Coach that was interviewed, presented 5 core themes that reflected their personal experiences, interpretations, and expertise in sports participation, especially within the sport that they teach. The 5 core themes that were presented in the research findings include confidence, positive encouragement, stress reduction, sports ability to teach life skills, and trust. Each core value was portrayed by the coaches as methods that contribute towards mental and physical well being, as well as positive coping skills to deal with stressors that athletes may experience in their life.

Hollenbeck and Hill (2004) stated:

Self-confidence is [one's] judgment of whether or not [he or she] can do something. [The research] is based on weighing all [one's] capabilities-[one's]

abilities, [one's] motivation, all the resources [he or she] can muster - versus the requirements of the task at hand (p. 257).

Within all aspects of sports participation, the coach is the leader and the mentor who assists athletes in the process of building their confidence levels. The coach is often considered the "heart" of the team and assists players in building their confidence levels so the players properly interact within the team and deal with difficulties or successes during practices, games, as well as deal with other issues that may not be related to sports. As expressed by most coaches during the qualitative interview process, confidence is a key ingredient that players often develop through playing or participation in the sport, which also carries into other aspects of life. For instance, one coach disclosed that he had a player on his team named "Hippie" who was very clumsy, timid, and lonesome in the beginning of the baseball season. Hippie appeared to have issues with low self-esteem and confidence, which presented as him being isolated on campus and him avoiding all forms of communication and interaction with others. The coach communicated with Hippie and provided many forms of

positive encouragements and praises, while placing him in many leadership positions, to help the athlete shape his self-esteem levels and utilize confidence to approach the game with more hardiness and grit. The coach expressed that Hippiie began "opening up" and would walk with a confidence that made him more interactive, friendly, and fun inside and outside the baseball field. An effective coach has the ability to help players understand that mistakes are normal and could be rectified by hard work and commitment. Confidence is an important factor in all sports because they promote the idea that any athlete has the ability to be a leader and utilize his or her personal strengths to contribute to the team in a positive way. The coach has an important role in contributing all the necessary tools towards helping each player develop faith and confidence in him or herself, as well as in the team.

Self-esteem and the development of social skills are important factors in creating team cohesion and positive relationships in sports participation. As athletes participate in sports, they are consistently practicing social skills, which are very necessary towards the advancement of the athlete and team. As mentioned by a

baseball coach during the interview process, without self-esteem and proper communication between team members during interactions, the team unit will falter. As explained by Slutzky and Simpkins (2009):

We found that time spent in organized team sport activities was indirectly associated with self-esteem via sport self-concept. That is, the more time children spent in team sports, the better they felt about their sport abilities, which, in turn, were positively associated with self-esteem (p. 386).

The development of self esteem in team sports is derived from the support network and guidance of all team members, especially the coach. As stated by one coach, all players enter the sport with their natural abilities in the beginning of the season and attempt to show their skills in some sort of way to the team. Some players are stronger than others in fundamental abilities; therefore, more attention and focus is utilized on the players with lesser fundamental skills. This will help the players build their confidence and self esteem levels to effectively contribute to the team.

As self-esteem levels increase within the athlete, the confidence and social skills practiced in the sport increase and contribute towards a change that also appears to be beneficial towards life skills. As mentioned by many coaches when they reflect on their players, most athletes appear to present themselves with more confidence and identify with the status they have as athletes. Self-esteem is a major attribute within a player who helps promote dedication, ethics, and communication during practices and games. Therefore, a strong self-esteem and faith are essential components for players and coaches to work towards a desired outcome.

The use of encouragement, praise, and positive reinforcement was another theme that was mentioned in the research findings, which are important factors within all sports because of its ability to reflect confidence and self esteem within the livelihood of its participants. According to Coatsworth and Conroy (2009):

Effects of youth sport participation are likely to be indirect and dependent on interpersonal and intrapersonal processes that operate within the sport context. Moreover, distinguishing the quality of youth experience from the quantity may be central

to understanding socialization and developmental processes in sport (p. 320).

The coach, who is the main leader and facilitator of the team, must utilize all aspects of positive encouragement to keep the athletes motivated and invested in their abilities to achieve success. As expressed by one coach, encouragement and praise actively helped one of his players throughout the school year and baseball season. This player was nicknamed "Wheezy" due to issues of anxiety, which made his breathing short and difficult during practices and games. The coach mentioned that he would incorporate small breathing exercises with Wheezy and encouraged him to utilize the methods during practices and in games. Throughout all activities, the coach and team members would yell out words of encouragement and praise to keep Wheezy motivated while he was on the field. With time, Wheezy began to utilize the skills he had learned from the coach as well as from the team and regulated his breathing to be able to fully contribute to the team's aspirations of success. The use of encouragement and positive reinforcements are methods to help strengthen the positive behaviors that an athlete is reflecting in the participation of the sport. The

coach must assess the needs of each player and pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses to help the athlete distinguish between what is beneficial to the team and what areas need to be improved. Furthermore, the use of encouragement appears to reflect a strength-based approach within sports participation that functions off of identifying and shaping firm attributes or the willingness to make a change for the better.

The compiled results from literature review as well as from this study reflected the use of sports participation was a method to reduce stress, while promoting positive life skills. As stated by Kimball and Freysinger (2003), findings suggest that leisure may be a means of coping with or buffering the impact of stressors, which can enhance an individual's health and well being. Participation in sports can help an individual discharge any excess energy that may reflect stressful experiences. Therefore, sports can be utilized as a positive coping method in dealing with difficulties in many life situations. As explained by a coach in the qualitative interview process, sports are ways to help athletes let loose their frustrations. If an individual does not have the proper techniques or skills to cope

with a stressful situation, he or she becomes more susceptible towards getting him or herself involved in gang activities, alcohol consumption, or drug usage. Sports are often utilized to help an individual deal with his or her stress and can also promote many positive skills in life. Kimball and Freysinger (2003) furthered their argument by stating that sports participation has essential positive developmental consequences for moral reasoning, physical health, and personal and social identity. The sport can also reflect a positive sense of escape from monotonous and routine work, provide recognition for commitment, and enhance the practice of social interaction skills.

Furthermore, another big factor within all sports is dealing with responsibilities, which reflects an attribute of enhancing life skills. For example, each coach has a method of checking every player's weekly grades to ensure that the athletes are keeping up with their academic performance. To verify that each player fulfills his or her academic responsibility, each coach indicated that weekly grade checks are required by the school. Although the athlete must present a minimum of a 2.5 grade point average (GPA), every coach actually

requires his or her players to present a minimum of a 3.0 GPA to participate in all team functions. Each coach stated that his or her stipulations for requiring a higher weekly grade point average was to promote the aspects of hard work and determination, which apply to all facets of life. Participation in exercise or sports has the ability to contribute to life skills that reflect necessary coping skills to deal with life stressors. Moreover, athletes develop skills that are also beneficial to advancement in life.

However, the primary theme expressed by each coach in the qualitative interview process is team cohesion which seems to be represented with the notion that the team unit is a close bond that reflects trust and love. As explained by many coaches, the team is more than a unit of athletes that represent a school or a league but like a family. Most athletes who participate in a team develop close friendships, which create a stronger support network throughout many life situations. For instance, a coach mentioned that one of his players was living in an abusive household, which led to him being kicked out of his home. As the athlete expressed his problem to a current teammate, he talked with his parents

and asked to let his friend stay with them. The parents agreed to allow the player to live with them throughout the season and the school year. Jowett and Chaundy (2004) stated that:

Group cohesion has become over the years and important small-group variable in a variety of settings, including sport. In fact, cohesion is such a fundamental component of groups that the mere existence of a sport team indicates a degree of togetherness (p. 302).

As team cohesion develops and becomes apparent in social settings, trust between players can grow into a bonding that is very similar to a family like relationship. Players and coaches will sacrifice personal belongings, space, and even positions to ensure the safety and well being of another teammate. The symbolism of team cohesion as it relates to a family like relationship is important to understand because of its ability to promote positive coping skills, an increase in confidence, and stress reduction. The social support network is consistently portrayed in every interactive trait within the team through encouragement, positive reinforcement and performance.

Limitations

The literature review contained some limitations within the studies. These studies included various sports and different approaches to exercise. Different studies conducted focused on one sport through the entire study. Using different sports should be tested when comparing the effectiveness in order to have an understanding whether the kind of sport had any effect on the subjects. In order to understand the effects, the outcome could be dependent on the type of sport: recreational, elite, or competitive. Further studies should focus on these issues.

Another limitation that was consistent among the literature was that the amount of exercise would need to be regulated in order to understand the quantity that is beneficial. According to Bowker (2006), "While the benefits of sports participation are clear, much of the sports participation is taking place outside of the school environment and [the] benefits only emerged when the child was participating in two or more *sports*" (p. 228). The amount of sports and exercise is not clearly known but this measurement evidently ranges from individual to individual because of different diversities

that exist. Some include physical strength, self-esteem, self-motivation, and disorders.

The benefits the literature review outlines can be potentially beneficial if applied to the social work setting. Although some limitations should further review different ways of analyzing the benefits of sports and exercise as an intervention, the framework of past literature gives sports a strong start to the potential acceptance from professional educators' perspectives as a beneficial support.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Clinicians dealing with particular mental health disorders or deficiencies should consider sports and exercise as a treatment modality. The clinician, using his communicative skills, can analyze the likes and dislikes of the client to determine which athletic endeavor is most appealing. After it is determined that the client has a preference for a particular sport, then the therapist can begin to implement strategies to involve the client in initial stages of development. Progressively, the therapist can go from training individually until they reach a stage of group

participation. During these sessions, the therapist will find a stronger rapport with the client and thereby open avenues of communication that didn't exist before.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. It has been stated that mental health issues threaten clients' identity and sense of self. However, sports and exercise are believed to help people develop courage, determination, and self esteem. Do you think that Sports is a positive outlet for individuals challenged with mental health issues? Why?
2. It is stated that therapy should be an open space for persons to re-author or constitute themselves, and their relationships according to alternative stories or knowledge. How might the involvement and experience of sports contribute to the psychological well being of an individual?
3. It is suggested in many research findings that sports helps individuals develop a sense of self-efficacy and positive coping skills to deal with aspects like depression. What are some positive coping skills that you think players often develop?
4. Resilience and hardiness in sport are positively associated with achievement and psychological well-being. Do you agree? Why?
5. Hardiness can be defined as a control of various life situations; commitment, being when one tends to involve in the action they are doing, and challenge, the extent to which players see challenges as opportunities. Do you feel that the experience of hardiness during games or practice helps players build a stronger self-esteem?
6. Physical activities, especially team sports, are essential in building positive healthy/social peer relationships. As a Coach, what are some aspects that you feel you contribute to the team?
7. The commonly used term "sports builds character" is used to analyze the traditional approaches of teamwork, loyalty, and discipline. Do you agree with the term, "Sports builds Character"? Why?
8. The personality, instruction, and behaviors of coaches and teachers seem to significantly affect the performance and growth of students. What are some things that you feel you have incorporated in your teaching to help build positive students?
9. It is stated in many research findings that people that are not active in sports or exercise are more likely to experience depression, or anxiety. Do you think these findings are accurate? Why?
10. It has been researched that intra-group cooperation/intra-group competition serves to produce intra-group harmony and solidarity, but can lead to social distance between competing groups. Why do you think this happens?

Developed by Gamaliel Beltran and Isais Wellington Smith

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

1

INFORMED CONSENT

You are invited to add your opinions and comments to a study of the perceived effectiveness of sports interventions on mental health. This study is being conducted by undergraduate social work students from CSUSB under the supervision of Dr. Davis. The results will be conveyed to the CSUSB library. The study has been approved by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the CSUSB Institutional Review Board.

There are a number of disorders that are affecting the lives of minors such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression, anxiety, and oppositional defiance. The literature states that sports as a form of intervention is helpful in helping minors with progression towards mental health improvement. The focus of this study is to find out the perceived effectiveness of sports as an intervention from professional educators (coaches) as they are the ones who directly interact with the players. If you take part in this study, you will be asked a couple questions about your perspectives on certain issues regarding your interactions with the players and your thoughts on their impact towards improvement. This should take no more than 1 hour.

The questions are anonymous and no record will be made or kept of your name or any indentifying information. You are asked to skip any questions if you choose not to answer them. The anonymous data from these surveys will not only be seen by the researchers; the results will be conveyed to CSUSB library and others in group form only.

There are no foreseeable risks to taking part and no personal benefits involved. Your opinions will help CSUSB and students and social workers to plan future programs that better match the interests of youth.

If you have any questions of concerns about this study you can contact School of Social Work Thomas D. Davis (909) 537-3839. The results will be poster at CSUSB School of Social Work website after the summer of 2011.

By marking below, you agree that you have been fully informed about this survey and are volunteering to take part.

Mark _____ Date _____

I agree to be taped during the interview _____ yes _____ no

APPENDIX C
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Thank you very much for taking a few minutes to let us know your opinions and comments. The questions you just answered was for a study of perceived effectiveness of sports intervention on mental health. It was conducted by undergraduate social work students from CSUSB under the supervision of Dr. Davis to provide information for future planning for the CSUSB School of Social Work. If you have any questions or concerns about this study you can contact Dr. Davis (909) 537-3839.

APPENDIX D

TABLE

Inter-viewer	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Years of Experience	Sport	Coach position
Coach #1	Male	27	Mexican American	9	Baseball High School J.V.	Infield/Pitching
Coach #2	Male	24	White	6	Baseball High School	All
Coach #3	Male	29	Hispanic	6	Baseball	All
Coach #4	Male	45	African American	10	Basketball	All
Coach #5	Male	28	African American	5	Baseball	All
Coach #6	Female	35	White	10	Track/Field	All

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:

Team Effort: Isais Smith & Gamaliel Cazarez

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Team Effort: Isais Smith & Gamaliel Cazarez

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

a. Introduction and Literature

Team Effort: Isais Smith & Gamaliel Cazarez

b. Methods

Team Effort: Isais Smith & Gamaliel Cazarez

c. Results

Team Effort: Isais Smith & Gamaliel Cazarez

d. Discussion

Team Effort: Isais Smith & Gamaliel Cazarez