

## **Role of Locus of Control and Gender on Psychological Well-being among Youth Athletes**

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### **Abstract**

*The study investigated the role of locus of control and gender on psychological well-being among youth athletes. Participants were 220 undergraduate athletes from Faculty of Social Science and Humanities Ebonyi State University Abakaliki, South-East, Nigeria. Two null hypotheses were tested: locus of control will not play significant role on psychological well-being of adolescent athletes and that gender will not play significant role on adolescent athletes' psychological well-being. Two hundred and twenty undergraduates participated in this research, 120 males and 100 females. The locus of control scale developed by Pettijohn (1992) based on Rotter's original idea and Ryff (1989) forty two-item Scale of Psychological well-being were used for collection of data. Cross sectional survey design was adopted for the study while the multiple linear Regression statistics was employed for data analysis. The two hypotheses tested were not accepted showing that locus of control and gender predicted adolescent athletes' psychological well-being.*

**Keywords:** *Locus of control, gender, psychological well-being, youth athletes.*

The increased interest in including the construct of well-being in studies has likely been stimulated by the understanding that a high level of psychological functioning, adaptive short-term responses of emotions and long term affects among athletes are crucial to perform optimally in high pressure environment over time (Jones, Meiyen, McCarthy, & Sheffield, 2009; Lundquist & Kentta, 2010). Moreover, well-being likely helps athletes deal with the diverse challenges they face during their sporting career (Nwankwo, Okechi, & Nweke, 2015)

Ensuring high level of psychological wellbeing among youth athletes should be a joint effort of all stakeholders to ensure corresponding impact on global health and well-being (Ryff, 1995). Sports as a major aspect of work and physical activity involve brain activation, physical health and combination of other factors to improve the psychological well-being of athletes (Decix, 2008).

Several researchers have conceptualized psychological well-being variously as: major aspect of health, education, sports and industries, (Briner, 2012); combination of positive affective states to impact positively on individual's social life, positive functioning and optimal effectiveness for improved health, well-being and behaviour (Decix, 2008);

Locus of control refers to whether one believes that the outcome of an event is decided by one's own actions or by chance (Rotter, 1966). One who believes an outcome is decided by his or her own actions is described to be someone high in internal locus of control; while an individual that attributes the outcome more to chance would be considered high in external locus of control. Athletes with internal locus of control tend to have good self-esteem and are more prone to getting over failure and engaging in new activities to help them move on Kirschenbaum, (1984). Those who have low self-esteem find it difficult to shake off feelings of disappointment and bitterness related to failure. Athletes with external locus of control tend to have low self-esteem, are prone to poor well-being and find it difficult to recover from the distress of failure in any performance because they lack the needed resilience (Sarker & Fletcher, 2014) Even criticisms are addressed in different ways: people with low self-esteem equally are likely to develop poor self-image and are more sensitive to the intensity of discomfort caused by criticism, as well as how long it lasts. How success is dealt with is also different; quite often, athletes with low self-esteem fall into anxious happiness, which results in a difficulty to enjoy the good times and cheer up for positive reasons, because they have poor value for self, as well as the happiness felt at that moment, these people also perceived its precariousness and prepare awaiting disappointment. Therefore we can see that these people do not only feel uncomfortable when facing failure in performance but also when facing success and social consequences of it.

In addition to the feeling of anxious happiness, they may also experience cognitive dissonance (an internal contradiction to do with the negative feelings they are experiencing and the reality that surrounds them) and anxiety because they can foresee other situations in which they will be forced to guarantee success thus, keeping up with the expectation that others may have of them (Smith, Ntoumanis, Duda, & Vansteenkiste, 2011). In other words, athletes with low self-esteem, even if they love success and the gratifications that come with it, also fear it because it contradicts their self-image and exposes them to situations in which they have to test themselves over and over again. A higher opinion of yourself is related to looking for ways to develop your personality and take risks whilst low self-esteem generates defense strategies and attempts to avoid any uncertainty. This is why athletes with good psychological well-being and high self-esteem want to succeed and those with low self-esteem are focused on their fear of failure (Nwankwo, Okechi, & Nweke, 2015)

Efforts to measure locus of control stem from the work of J.B. Rotter, with the creation of the Rotter Locus of Control Scale. Through this scale, the participant is given two viewpoints from which to choose, and of those viewpoints, one gives credit towards the self, or internal locus of control, the other crediting outside forces, or external locus of control (Rotter, 1966).

Per Rotter's instructions, a score is tallied across a single continuum, with a high score indicating high external locus of control, and a low score suggesting higher internal locus of control.

Past studies have consistently found that locus of control is associated with psychological well-being, with conclusions all based upon Rotter's unidimensional definition. Such studies include Garber (1980) who concluded that indicators of good psychological well-being came

from participants reporting lower indices of stress and depression, linking it to high internal locus of control.

Grob (2000) reported that stress is often the result of feeling powerless in a given situation, which suggests it is linked to having an external locus of control. According to Emmons and Diener (1989), individuals who are low in self-esteem are more likely to believe outcomes are not under their own influence and control, and Emmons (1986) concluded that different variables influence well-being if they affect a person's ability to achieve his or her goals. In an interesting divergence theory cross-cultural study, more individualistic cultures were shown to have high subjective well-being, attributing it to high internal locus of control (Stocks, 2012).

Klonowicz (2001), in trying to measure locus of control as a determinant of subjective well-being made similar conclusions, concluding that high internal locus of control relates to more positive affect. These studies suggest that locus of control both internal and external each have a unique relationship to psychological well-being among athletes.

Internal locus of control will positively predict unique variance in self-esteem and negatively predict unique variance in depression and stress when controlling for external locus of control. External locus of control will negatively predict unique variance in esteem and positively predict unique variance in stress and depression when controlling for internal locus of control.

#### Studies related to gender and psychological well-being

Mills, Grasmick, Morgan, and Wenk, (1992) conducted a study on "The Effects of Gender, Family satisfaction and economic strain on Psychological Well-Being" in which only married respondents were considered for the survey (n= 197). (Radloff's Psychological Well-being Scale was employed. It was found that husbands had higher Psychological Well-Being than wives. A study on "Gender Difference in Psychological Well-being among Filipino College Student Samples" was done by Perez as a cross-sectional and non- experimental quantitative study among Adolescent students of Philippines. Along with Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB), Daily Spiritual Experience Scale, Parent-Adolescent Relationship Scale, Teacher and Peer Relationship Scale, Positive and Negative Affect Scale were used. Female participants scored significantly higher in two of the sub-scales of PWB, i.e. Positive Relationship with Others and Purpose in Life, whereas Male participants scored higher in Autonomy. There were no significant differences in the other sub-scales of PWB. (Perez, 2012)

Another study by Roothman, Kirsten, and Wissing, (2003) on "Gender differences in aspects of Psychological Well-Being" was done as a meta-analysis on a multicultural sample (n= 378). The participants were asked to complete 13 scales measuring various aspects of PWB. Females scored higher on expression of affect, somatic symptoms and religious well-being, whereas Males scored higher on physical self-concept, automatic thoughts (positive), constructive thinking, cognitive flexibility, total self-concept and fortitude.

#### Statement of the Problems

This study bothers on the following statement of problems: Will locus of control significantly correlate with psychological well-being of student athletes?

Will gender significantly correlate with psychological well-being of student athletes?

**Hypotheses:** To this effect, the following hypotheses will be tested:

Locus of control will not play statistically significant role on psychological well-being of student athletes.

Gender will not play statistically significant role on psychological well-being among student athletes.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Two hundred and twenty (220) participants drawn from 100 levels student athletes in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, South East of Nigeria took part in the study. 82 student athletes participated from Psychology department, 67 student athletes participated from Mass communication department and 71 student athletes also participated from Economics department. The participants were randomly selected across board in the faculty auditorium before training during the just concluded 2015 Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities week. One hundred and twenty (120) were males, while one hundred (100) were females. 76.4% of the participants were single while 23.6% were married. All the participants were undergraduates who reported having GCE/WASC as their highest qualification and they are all literate. Their age ranged from 18-30 years, with a mean age of 24 years. All the respondents' volunteered to participate in the study as they have been representing their departments during the 100 level inter-departmental and inter-faculty sports competitions.

### **Instruments**

The instruments used in collection of data were the locus of control scale developed by Terry Pettijohn on Julian Rotter's original idea (1992) and Ryff C, (1989). 42 item Scale of Psychological well-being.

### **Procedure**

The participants of the study were student athletes drawn from the 100 level students of psychology, mass communication and economics departments respectively, of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, South-East, Nigeria. After seeking the consent of the faculty director of sports in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities auditorium during faculty week briefing, he gave his consent for the researchers to explain to the student athletes the rationale of the study. The aim and rationale of the research were explained to them and rapport was established. Two hundred and forty (240) copies of the questionnaires were distributed using random sampling techniques with the help of research assistants and they filled out the questionnaires within a space of thirty (30) minutes before going out for their training. Two hundred and thirty (230) copies of the questionnaires were returned, ten (10) copies were discarded due to wrong filling while the remaining two hundred and twenty (220) copies were used for statistical analysis.

## **Design/Statistics**

Cross sectional survey design was adopted for the study while the multiple linear Regression Model was employed for data analysis.

## Results

*Table 1: The mean score and standard deviation of locus of control and gender groups on psychological well-being.*

Groups	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	Standard Deviation (SD)	Sample size (N)
Locus of Control			
Internal	193.27	56.75	114
External	130.64	55.94	106
Gender			
Male	182.25	58.83	120
Female	140.11	63.50	100

The result in the table above shows the mean and standard deviation of locus of control on Psychological Well Being. Internal locus of control indicates higher mean score  $\bar{X} = 193.27$  with standard deviation  $SD = 56.75$  compared to the external locus of control ( $\bar{X} = 130.64, SD = 55.94$ ).

The table also shows the mean score and standard deviation of gender on Psychological Well Being. Male gender indicates higher mean  $\bar{X} = 182.25$  with standard deviation  $SD = 58.83$  than the female gender ( $\bar{X} = 140.11$  with  $SD = 63.50$ ).

*Table 2: Regression summary result for locus of control and gender on Psychological Well Being.*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.508 <sup>a</sup>	.258	.251	55.71659

a. Predictors: (Constant), Locus of Control, GENDER

The table above shows that 25.8% of the total variation in the dependent variation (Psychological Well Being) can be explained by the independent variables (locus of control and gender). This shows the strength of association between Psychological Well Being, locus of control and gender (Adjusted R-square = .258).

*Table 3: ANOVA summary result table on locus of control and gender on Psychological Well Being.*

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	234391.625	2	117195.813	37.752	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	673641.370	217	3104.338		
	Total	908032.995	219			

The multiple regression which gave the ANOVA table above used to predict sports participation from locus of control and gender. These variables statistically predicted Psychological Well Being,  $F(2, 217) = 37.752, p < 0.001$ .

Table 4: Multiple Linear Regression coefficients result for locus of control and gender on Psychological Well Being.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		95% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	Lower Bound Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	273.495	13.746		19.897	.000	246.402 300.587
	Gender	-20.316	8.226	-.157	-2.470	.014	-36.528 -4.103
	Locus of Control	-54.561	8.197	-.424	-6.656	.000	-70.717 -38.404

The table above shows that gender has been negatively statistically significantly related to Psychological Well Being with  $B = -20.316$ ,  $t = -2.470$ ,  $p < 0.05$

On the other hand, locus of control was also negatively statistically significantly related to Psychological Well Being with  $B = -54.541$ ,  $t = -6.656$ ,  $p < 0.05$

## Discussion

The result of this study indicates that locus of control plays a significant role on psychological well-being of youth athletes. Results also indicate that gender significantly predicted psychological well-being of youth athletes.

The first hypothesis which stated that locus of control will not play a statistically significant role on psychological well-being of student athletes was not accepted. The result revealed that, Internal locus of control indicates a higher mean score  $\bar{X} = 193.27$  compared to the external locus of control  $\bar{X} = 130.64$ . The result therefore shows that individuals with an internal locus of control have a higher psychological well-being tendency than their external locus of control counterparts who tend to have a low psychological well-being. This tends to be in agreement with past studies which have found that locus of control is associated with psychological well-being. Such studies include Garber (1980) who concluded that indicators of good psychological well-being came from participants reporting lower indices of stress and depression, linking it to high internal locus of control.

Grob (2000), similarly reported that stress is often the result of feeling powerless in a given situation, which suggests it is linked to having an external locus of control. According to Emmons and Diener (1989), individuals who are low in self-esteem are more likely to believe outcomes are not under their own influence and control.

This study the present study also disagrees with the position of the second hypothesis which stated that Gender will not play a statistically significant role on psychological well-being of student athletes. Thus, it was not accepted as the result shows in the mean score of gender on Psychological Well Being that the Male gender indicates a higher mean  $\bar{X} = 182.25$  than the female gender  $\bar{X} = 140.11$ . Therefore, since male athletes have a higher mean than their female counterparts, the male have better psychological well-being compared to their female counterparts. This is in line with the study of Mills, Grasmick, Morgan, and



Wenk, (1992), a study on “The Effects of Gender, Family satisfaction and economic strain on Psychological Well-Being”, Radloff’s Psychological Well-being Scale was employed. It was found that male had higher Psychological Well-Being than female. It therefore calls for all stakeholders in students’ sports administration and performance to give positive and inclusive considerations to locus of control and psychological well-being of student athletes during selection, training and competition to ensure proper commitment, longevity and progressive performance among athletes.

#### Implications of the study

It was implicated in this study that locus of control tends to play significant role on psychological well-being of youth athletes, this means that social psychologists especially sport psychologist are to be properly integrated into ministry of youth and sports. They should emphasize mind training and orientation programs that build and modify the locus of control system of athletes and ensure that all athletes should be adequately involved in such orientation and training/development programs. The factor of gender must not be taken lightly. In view of the implication of gender in psychological well-being of youth athletes, this finding supports the prediction that gender tends to impact on psychological well-being of youth athletes since gender differences predicted psychological well-being of youth athletes; this information may help stakeholders in youth and sports development to expand their development strategies to be all inclusive. This suggests that they should consider both males and females in their development strategies to ensure equitable gender sensitivity. In view of the implication of this study, it is pertinent to note that for improvement on psychological well-being of youth athletes, there is need to modify the locus of control of student athletes to improve internality among sportsmen. Better modification strategies should be emphasized among stakeholders and sportsmen. There should be regular mind training, proper orientation and education of youths on importance of internality of sportsmanship. Gender inclusion should be a factor worthy of attention. There should be adequate enlightenment at the primary school level to build intrinsic interest in young athletes irrespective of gender differences. Above all, emphasis should be laid on government sponsorship of better and practical programmes towards behavior modification for the optimal improvement on psychological well-being of youth athletes.

#### Limitations of the study

Despite the contributions of this study, it is however not devoid of limitations arising from several aspects of the work that may not meet the expectation of the readers. Such as, Time constraint; more so there was no grants from the government to finance the study.

Also, the number of variables studied in this work is another limitation of the study. Therefore, such variables like economic status, self-concept, locality and a host of other variables if studied can impact more on youth sport participation.

#### Suggestions for Further Researches

With regards to the numerous limitations from this study the following suggestions are put forward by the researchers for further researches:

1. Embarking on a similar study with more participants from more than one institution and state in the country.

2. Embarking on related study using such variables like age, locality, economic status, self-concept and a host of others as variables that may impact on psychological well-being of youth athletes.
3. Moreso, more number of participants should be involved in subsequent studies.

## Conclusion

This (study has) clearly shown with emphasis the need to improve the internality of student athletes without gender bias in order to develop a high psychological well-being of student athletes. It is concluded that the sport psychology research on locus of control, gender and psychological well-being among student athletes must be given optimal attention as many studies on psychological well-being have not been explicitly on sports and athletes' locus of control. Researchers investigating athlete's locus of control, gender and psychological well-being on a global level should adopt established in-depth base on sport psychology. At the contextual sports level it is concluded that the knowledge level of what constitutes sport-related psychological well-being and locus of control seems presently shallow. Therefore, it is apparently crucial to note that future qualitative research is warranted to enable the exploration of sportsmanship locus of control and psychological well-being in a greater depth. An increased understanding of locus of control, gender and psychological well-being in athletes is needed, this knowledge could potentially address aspects of challenges in sports that constitute obstacles, so as to facilitate student athletes' possibilities to flourish and use their full potentials as both humans and athletes. Moreover an increasing body of evidence suggests that interventions geared towards increasing internality may enhance psychological well-being and overall health over time, which facilitates adaptive long-term coping resources. Therefore, sport psychologists, team coaches, workers and stakeholders in schools and sports development as well as the government and other philanthropist and helping professionals should pay productive attention to these important factors as they are obviously tantamount to building Psychological Well-being in sportsmanship among the students athletes and ensuring all inclusion to eradicate gender biases and stereotype.

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