Emotional Intelligence or Nonverbal Intelligence: Which is a Better Predictor of Athletes' Positive Mental Health?

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Even though it is well established that the involvement in physical activities will positively influence the psychological functioning of the individuals, little is known about the positive mental health aspects of competitive athletes—a group actively involved in physical activities. The present study aimed to examine four person factors namely gender, age, nonverbal intelligence and emotional intelligence as the potential predictors of athlete's mental health. The participants were 304 Indian athletes (161 male and 143 female) participating in different competitive sporting events. Positive mental health was assessed by Mental Health Status Scale while emotional intelligence and nonverbal intelligence were assessed by Emotional Intelligence Scale for sport persons and Advanced Progressive Matrices respectively. The results showed that age, gender and emotional intelligence were the significant predictors of athletes’ positive mental health. Emotional intelligence explained 29% variance in positive mental health when age, gender and nonverbal intelligence were statistically controlled. The significance of the results is discussed along with study limitations.

Keywords: Positive mental health, emotional intelligence, nonverbal intelligence, athletes

Historically, two trends in psychology and psychiatry have contributed to the concept of mental health. One trend is more pragmatic and consonant with current psychiatric practice, which has made the control and treatment of mental disorders its primary objectives. This approach characterizes mental health as the absence of mental disease (Troisi & McGuire, 1998). The other attempts to understand and define mental health in a positive sense that includes the optimum of growth and happiness combined with the capacity to participate in the reproduction of society, a balance between inner life and adaptations to reality, and a successful welding into a whole of the different parts of the personality leading to an integrated self-concept. These definitions emphasize a harmonious view of mental life. This approach is more consistent with the definition of health adopted by the World Health Organization: ‘Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity’ (WHO, 2010). The concept of mental health adopted in the present investigation is congruent with the second trend. Jahoda (1958) elaborated on this by separating mental health into six domains such as (a) attitudes toward one’s own self—various distinctions in the manner of perceiving oneself are regarded as demonstrating higher or lower degrees of health; (b) self-actualisation – is concerned