

CHEERLEADERS' MOTIVATION AND READINESS TO RETURN TO SPORT FOLLOWING INJURY

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(Received 30 October 2020; accepted 3 December 2020; published online 15 January 2021)

To cite this article: Cornelius, C., & Tan, B. (2021). *CHEERLEADERS' MOTIVATION AND READINESS TO RETURN TO SPORT FOLLOWING INJURY*. *Malaysian Journal of Movement, Health & Exercise*, 10(1). doi:<https://doi.org/10.15282/mohe.v10i1.496>
Link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.15282/mohe.v10i1.496>

Abstract

Returning to sport following an injury is a process that is riddled with difficulties, especially so for competitive athletes. This is a quantitative research employed survey method. A total of 130 cheerleaders (age = 25.66 ± 4.928 years old) participated in this study where they have suffered from an injury that has put them out from sports for 1 - 4 weeks. Two inventories were completed: 1) Adapted Sport Motivation Scale and 2) Readiness to Return to Sport Questionnaire. The demographic data collected were age, team cheer division, position in team and injury duration. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (Pearson product-moment correlation, Independent T-test and One-way ANOVA) were used to analyze the data. Results from the study showed that there were significant effects ($p < 0.05$) of intrinsic motivation (toward accomplishment and experience stimulation) and extrinsic motivation (identified regulation, introjected and external regulation) of athletes towards returning to sport after injury. This demonstrated that motivation significantly influenced athletes' readiness to return to sport following an injury. Correlation analyses revealed that the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation towards athletes' readiness to return to sports following injury were associated with a positive renewed perspective on engaging in sports. As the athletes perceived themselves to be psychologically ready to return to sport after injury; it also reflected on their self-determination to attempt the sport again without fear, worry, concern and anxiety of reinjure from occurring. This study indicated the importance of motivation in assisting injured athletes in returning to sport. Most athletes returned to sport because of others' expectations on themselves although they were not fully mentally prepared to return to sport due to their fear and concerns of performing at peak performance again.

Keywords: Cheerleading, sport motivation, sport injury, return to sport

Introduction

Sport injuries are part and parcel of an athlete's lifespan. Though it is an unfortunate part of sport participation, numerous athletes have undergone the phases of sustaining injuries in the sport to recovery and returning successfully. However, it is exceedingly important to consider that regardless of how successful an athlete is at returning to play, throughout the process of returning, the athlete is plagued with a number of concerns ranging from reinjury fears to the capability of attaining past performance results. From a traditional perspective, athletes return to sport is dependent on a number of physical criteria such as recommendations for medical staff to functional skill assessment to ensure athletes are capable of meeting past performance standards (Clover and Wall, 2010). Arden et al. (2016a) elucidated that it is important to consider the athlete's psychological readiness to successfully return to sport. Consequently, numerous studies (e.g. Podlog, Banham, Wadey, & Hannon, 2015; Arden et al., 2016a; Conti, Fronso, Robazza & Bertollo, 2019) have pointed towards the importance of considering both physical and psychological assessment on athlete's readiness to return to sport.

In competitive cheerleading, the degree of difficulty continues to increase by year with more complex stunts being performed by cheerleaders. This has ultimately led to the rising number of injuries sustained over the years. In 1980, nearly 5000 emergency room visits were because of injuries due to cheerleading, and by 1994, the number had increased to an estimated around 16,000. (Jacobson et al., 2004). The increase in reported injuries sustained demonstrated the prevalence of sporting injuries among cheerleaders due to the rise in the complexity of the skills performed. Researchers discovered that out of the 27 cheerleaders, 34.8 % of them got injured due to the player- surface contact (Marar, McIlvain, Fields, & Comstock, 2012). Also, (Labella, 2013) state that other factors that caused an increased risk in cheerleading injury are higher body mass index, previous injury, performing stunts and also supervised by a coach with a low level of training and experience. While injuries sustained are often acute, but the psychological concerns are every present, and there is a need to further explore a cheerleaders' psychological preparation and their belief in being able to successfully return to the sport as was indicated by Podlog et al., (2015).

Furthermore, not many literatures have highlighted the athletes' preparedness or the motivating factors which would trigger an athlete to return to sport following an injury. Glazer (2009) stated that athletes not only need to be physically prepared but also psychologically ready to return to sport. Podlog and Eklund (2005) succinctly outline that motivational factors might play an important role in identifying between those who would make a return to sport and those who regardless being physically capable of returning but decide not to return to the sport. Furthermore, there was a lack of study in the relationship between motivation and readiness to return to sport among cheerleaders in Malaysia where more studies have been done on ACL or hamstring injury in return to sport. Studies by (Arden et al., 2011, Arden et al., 2012) emphasis on the dearth of studies that uses cheerleading as a sport to research into. The Readiness to Return to Sport Questionnaire appears to be a gateway to avoid returning athletes to sports after sustaining an injury before they are psychologically ready (Williams, 2013).

Therefore, this study is to examine the relationship between motivation and the readiness to return to sport among cheerleaders.

Methodology

Subjects

One hundred thirty cheerleaders from around Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia were recruited for this study based on selection criteria of age (13 years – 25 years), competition level (high school, university or open), team cheer division (level 4, 5 or 6), injury area, position in the team (base or flyer) and injury duration (1 week, 2 weeks, 3 weeks or ≥ 4 weeks). Exclusion criteria were dropout from cheerleading, aged below 13 years and over 25 years and have not participated in team cheer division (level 4, 5, or 6).

Motivation Measure

Sport motivation was assessed using a 20-item self-report questionnaire version of the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS; Podlog and Eklund, 2015), across a 7 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("does not correspond at all") to 7 ("corresponds exactly"). This questionnaire was adapted to assess the individual motivation to return to sport or partake in the sport. The SMS consisted of five dimensions reflecting the constructs of (a) Intrinsic Motivation-Accomplishment (IM-accomplishment; 4 items); (b) Intrinsic Motivation – experience stimulation (IM-Stimulation; 4 items); (c) Extrinsic Motivation - Identified (EM-identified regulation; 4 items); (d) Extrinsic Motivation-introjected regulation (EM-introjected regulation; 4 items); and (e) Extrinsic Motivation – external regulation (EM-external regulation; 4 items). However, there were no reported local reliability and validity. A pilot study done on the adapted version of SMS showed a strong validity and reliability where the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) is 0.86 and the reliability of SMS subscales were SMS IM-stimulation $\alpha = .71$, SMS IM accomplishment $\alpha = .67$, SMS identified regulation $\alpha = .58$, SMS introjected regulation $\alpha = .77$, and SMS external regulation $\alpha = .67$.

Readiness to Return to Sport Measure

The Readiness to Return to Sport Questionnaire (Williams, 2012) is a 5-factor instrument with a 20-item self-report questionnaire, designed to determine if an athlete is psychologically ready to return to sports after an injury. The Readiness to Return to Sport Questionnaire was scored on a 5 point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 5 (“Strongly Agree”) and measures the athlete’s belief about engaging in sport as well as the preparation for returning to sport. There are nine items in belief about engaging in sport and 11 items in belief about preparation for returning to sport. A pilot study was done on showed a strong validity and reliability where the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) is 0.98, and the reliability of the subscales was a belief about engaging in sport $\alpha = .64$ and belief about preparation for returning to sport $\alpha = .76$.

Procedures

Approval to carry out this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee, Tunku Abdul Rahman University College. Cheerleading teams and clubs around Kuala Lumpur were approached, and each subject was enquired on their willingness to partake in this study. Subjects’ consent was obtained using a consent form that detailed the area, scope, and objective of the study. Prior to answering the questionnaires, subjects were required to fill up a copy of the consent form. Subjects were required to fill up three questionnaires for the study that covered (1) Participant Information (2) Sport Motivation Scale and (3) Readiness to Return to Sport Questionnaire, which took about 15 to 20 minutes to complete. All subjects were required to answer every item in the questionnaires as truthfully as possible.

Statistical Analysis

Data obtained from the study were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Science version 21.

Results

Table 1 depicts the participant’s demographic characteristics. Majority of the subjects were aged between 18 to 22 years with most of them competing within cheer division level 4 (37.7%) and level 6 (38.5%). Due to the make-up of a cheerleading team, majority of the subjects played the position of a base in the team (61.5%) with 52.3% of them having competed at the All-Star/Open level. Moreover, 44.6% of all subjects have reported that they suffered injuries to the upper extremities that lasted about two weeks (33.8%).

Table 1. Subjects’ demographics (n = 130)

Measures	Frequency	(%)
Age		
13 – 17	21	16.2
18 – 22	69	53.1
23 – 28	40	30.8
Cheer Division		
Level 4	49	37.7
Level 5	31	23.8
Level 6	50	38.5
Position		
Base	80	61.5
Flyer	50	38.5
Injury Area		
Upper extremity	58	44.6
Lower extremity	50	38.5
Head	10	7.7
Neck	12	9.2
Injury Duration	34	26.2

1 week	44	33.8
2 weeks	20	15.4
3 weeks	32	24.6
4 weeks or more		

Intrinsic Motivation and Demographic Measures

Analysis of the IM dimensions showed there was a significant age group difference for IM to accomplish [F (2,127) = 5.094, p = 0.007*]. Cheerleaders’ aged between 18 to 22-year-old (M = 23.07 ± 2.505) showed a higher mean score for IM to accomplish compared with cheerleaders aged between 13 to 17 years old and 23 to 28 years old. There was also a significant age group difference for external stimulation (F (2,127) = 6.606, p = 0.002*) where cheerleaders aged between 18 to 22 years old (M = 23.22 ± 2.738) had higher mean score compared to those aged between 13 to 17 years old (M = 20.52 ± 4.445) as well as 23 to 28 years old (M = 22.35 ± 2.445).

Furthermore, the analysis results for the internal motives towards accomplishment was also significant based on different injury duration [F (2,127) = 3.554, p = 0.016*] where a cheerleader was sidelined away from the sport due to injury. Furthermore, cheerleaders’ who were away for a period of more than 4 weeks (M = 23.53 ± 2.824) showed a higher mean score compared to cheerleaders’ that have been away for 1 week (M = 21.47 ± 3.047) where the length of time away from the sport affected an individual’s drive to obtain pleasure and self-satisfaction from their accomplishment in cheerleading after returning to the sport.

Table 2 also depicts the T-test analysis results based on position in the team found there was a significant difference between the position in the team (M = 23.36 vs 21.99; p = 0.014*). Cheerleaders who played the role as flyers (M = 23.24 ± 2.684) in the team, had a higher experience stimulation mean score compared to bases as flyers are more highlighted during a competitive performance as they are usually at the top of a pyramid formation (Sloan, Pickle & Sloan, 2015) performing twist, stunts, rotations and gymnastics manoeuvres (Werd, Knight, Langer & Ross, 2010).

Study result for the EM introjected regulation revealed a significant cheer division difference [F (2,127) = 8.633, p = 0.000*]. Cheerleaders competing within cheer division level 5 (M = 21.71 ± 2.327) had a higher mean score compared to those competing within division level 4 (M = 18.57 ± 5.458) and division level 6 (M = 21.42 ± 2.807). There was also a significant difference for EM external regulation based on cheer division [F (2,127) = 7.324, p = 0.001*] where cheerleaders competing within division level 5 had a higher mean score compared to division level 6 and level 4 (M = 20.19 vs. 19.72 vs. 17.27).

Table 2. T-test on Motivation subscale and Demographic Measure

Parameter		N	M	SD	t	P
Intrinsic Motivation – Experience Stimulation	Base	80	21.99	3.140	0.045	0.014*
	Flyer	50	23.36	2.926		

Table 3. ANOVA analysis of Motivation subscales and Demographic Measure

Subscales	Measures	N	M	SD	F/t	P	
Intrinsic Motivation - Accomplishment	Age	13 – 17	21	21.00	4.062	5.094 ^a	0.007*
		18 – 22	69	23.07	2.505		
		23 – 28	40	22.35	2.445		
	Injury Duration (Weeks)	1	34	21.47	3.047	3.554 ^a	0.016*
		2	44	23.02	2.619		
		3	20	23.05	2.373		
≥4		32	23.53	2.782			
Intrinsic Motivation - Experience Stimulation	Age	13 – 17	21	20.52	4.445	6.606 ^a	0.002*
		18 – 22	69	23.22	2.738		
		23 – 28	40	22.35	2.445		
Extrinsic Motivation -		4	49	18.57	5.458	8.633 ^a	0.000*

Introjected Regulation	Cheer	5	31	21.71	2.327		
	Division	6	50	21.42	2.807		
Extrinsic Motivation - External Regulation	Cheer	4	49	17.27	5.118	7.324 ^a	0.001*
	Division	5	31	20.19	2.469		
		6	50	18.91	2.983		

Table 4: Correlation between Motivation Subscales with Readiness to Return to Sport Following Injury Subscales

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. IM-Accomplishment	-						
2. IM-Experience Stimulation	0.758**	-					
3. EM-Identified Regulation	0.583**	0.604**	-				
4. EM-Introjected Regulation	0.261**	0.255**	0.380**	-			
5. EM- External Regulation	0.208**	0.268**	0.339**	0.685**	-		
6. Belief about Engaging in Sport	0.229*	0.263**	0.356**	0.346**	0.219*	-	
7. Belief about Preparation to Return to Sport	0.50	0.120	0.165	0.177*	0.180*	0.268**	-

IM – Intrinsic Motivation

EM – Extrinsic Motivation

* $p < .05$., ** $p < .01$.

Our correlational result showed that the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation dimensions and psychological readiness to return to sport following injury have shown to have a bidirectional relationship as Podlog et al. (2015) stated that participants who were away from sports for a long time due to injury understood and were highly aware that in order to return to the sport successfully, it would take a period of time and sufficient level of motivation in order to attain previous performance levels as they return to the sport. Motivation dimensions affect an athlete's perception and their readiness to reengage in the sport again based on the belief that their rehabilitation program was effective, and their injury has fully recovered (Podlog et al., 2015). Thus, our study results demonstrated that there was a positive relationship between the belief in engaging in sport again with motivation dimensions: IM-Accomplishment ($r = 0.229$, $p = 0.009$), IM-Experience Stimulation ($r = 0.263$, $p = 0.002$), EM-Identified Regulation ($r = 0.356$, $p = 0.000$), EM-Introjected Regulation ($r = 0.346$, $p = 0.000$) and EM-External Regulation ($r = 0.219$, $p = 0.012$). As for the cheerleader's belief in their preparation to return to sport, our results point out that for extrinsic motivation dimensions: Introjected Regulation ($r = 0.177$, $p = 0.045$) and External Regulation ($r = 0.180$, $p = 0.041$) had a positive relationship with the cheerleader's belief in their preparation to return to the sport which could be based on their belief in their rehabilitation programme, complete recovery of their sustained injuries and the possibility of attaining functional capability and previous performance levels.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to investigate the effect and relationship that motivation has on cheerleaders' psychological readiness to return to sport following injury based on age, position in the team and cheer division level. Firstly, regardless of the cheerleaders' age, position in the team and cheer division level, our study results emphasized the importance of intrinsic motivation towards a cheerleader's successful return to sport following injury. According to Conti et al. (2019), an athlete's psychological response process, especially in the period

of post-injury recovery, behaves in a cyclic and dynamic manner that is affected by the individual's thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

Our findings suggest that cheerleaders' drive for accomplishment within competitive cheerleading had directly affected their growing desires to return to sport successfully following injury. Intrinsic motivation – accomplishment refers to the self-satisfaction and pleasure that one achieves by being involved in sport as well as the process of trying and achieving new goals and objectives (Lonsdale, Hodge, & Rose, 2009). Cheerleaders aged between 18 to 22 years old are within the age range of transitioning from adolescents to adulthood and are faced with pressures not only from the sport but also from their parents, peers and self (Waters, 2013). Thus, cheerleaders that are transitioning between adolescence to adulthood are plagued with the choice of participating in the sport competitively or to retire from competitive cheerleading and focusing on future pathways (Raabe and Readdy, 2016). This causes the cheerleaders to be more driven to return to the team to achieve unfulfilled desires and goals prior to injury as collegiate cheerleaders' are at a stage where there is a substantial change in their personal and social structures that indirectly cause older cheerleaders to consider leaving the sport in order to focus more on their academic pursuits (Raabe and Readdy, 2016).

Findings from this study pointed at the cheerleaders need to experience positive emotions and satisfaction from performing with their teammates and in front of an audience is affected by age. Cheerleaders aged between 18 to 22 years old were driven to return to the sport successfully as stated by Podlog, Dimmock, and Miller (2011) in order to experience stimulating sensations by being able to train and perform with their teammates (Raabe and Readdy, 2016); performing before an audience and experiencing the thrill of executing stunts, skills and gymnastics manoeuvres successfully. This is further supported by Sonya, Reel, and Pearce (2011) where they found that older cheerleaders were more focused on their performance and demonstrated the capability in executing the prerequisite stunts and skills within a cheerleading routine successfully which not only allows the cheerleaders to derive satisfaction out of a successful performance but also being able to perform alongside their teammates and entertain the audience.

Furthermore, our findings also showed that the length of time away from the sport affects a cheerleader's desire to accomplish within their sport or to try new skills. This is especially true for any athlete where, Ruddock-Hudson, O'Halloran, and Murphy, (2014) discovered that athletes who have been away from the sport for 4 weeks or more might be plagued with negative emotions, the inconsistency of recovery and attainment of pre-performance levels as well as the challenge to remain positive compared to those with minor injuries. For cheerleaders, they are faced with the daunting possibility of being replaced and losing their position in the team especially if they sustained a severe injury which keeps them away from the sport for a length of time. Furthermore, cheerleaders' return to sport after a length of time loss is also dependent on the athlete's status, where Memon et al. (2018) discovered that an athlete's return to sport outcomes regardless of the length of time loss was affected by an athlete's status. Their study further elucidated that collegiate and professional athletes demonstrated higher success rates of return to sport following injury compared to recreational athletes. This is mainly due to recreational athletes taking a longer time to ensure complete recovery of the injury and attainment of full functional capability.

Of the extrinsic motivation dimensions, our findings found that the different competition division affected the cheerleaders' external motives towards returning to the sport following injury. Raabe and Readdy (2016) discovered that cheerleaders would constantly improve their skills and had a burning desire to be able to perform complex routines as they climb up the cheer division and competitive levels which further supports our findings. Our study recruited cheerleaders from the Scholastic and Open Divisions, which is further divided into levels 4 to 6 for Team Cheer. Cheerleaders who competed within Level 5 (Elite) and Level 6 (Premier) are driven to return to the sport due to the guilt and fear that they have in disappointing their teammates and coaches if they were unable to return or unable to perform as previously. Podlog and Eklund (2016) stated that returning athletes are driven to ensure that they can fulfil their role in the team from scoring points or executing difficult moves and hitting performance levels. For example, a cheerleader that plays the role as a base which has had a wrist injury would be driven to ensure that he/she can provide the necessary support for his fellow base teammates while still assist and support the flyers which perform in the air and at the top of the pyramid. Besides that, cheerleaders may experience the pressure of losing their position in the team or the chance to compete if they were unable to return to the sport on time. This causes the cheerleaders to return prematurely to the sport where they may perform the stunts and skills in pain or without complete recovery (Podlog, Dimmock, & Miller, 2011). Besides that, cheerleaders that compete within Division Level 5 and Level 6 would

assess their return to the sport from injury as being successful and effective based on their capability to contribute to the team and in fulfilling their role (Podlog, Dimmock, & Miller, 2011). Cheerleaders that return to the sport after injury tend to be driven to perform and contribute to the team as they did previously may be due to verbalized desires of their coaches and teammates that recognized the critical role that the injured athlete had played in the team and in the performance (Podlog et al., 2015). Thus, cheerleaders may view their return to the sport as being successful only if they possess the ability to remain competitive against new upcoming cheerleaders and are still able to improve their skill sets while contributing towards the team (Podlog, Dimmock, & Miller, 2011).

Collectively, motivation dimensions showed a positive correlation with psychological readiness to return to sport following injury in our study results. This may be due to the self-satisfaction that cheerleaders obtain when they are able to reengage the sport and belief that they are still accepted as part of the team. Raabe and Readdy (2016) emphasized that cheerleaders and athletes alike do experience a high degree of satisfaction feeling connected to the team and their teammates as most team sport athletes spent a lot of time together outside and inside the sport. Furthermore, Raabe and Readdy (2016) elucidated that in order for athletes and cheerleaders to be able to successfully return to the sport following injury may be due to the strong social support from their teammates that aids the cheerleaders to be better prepared psychologically and physically to return to sport while hitting performance goals.

Conclusion

The study findings demonstrated the relationship between the motivation dimensions and the psychological readiness to prepare and reengage the sport as found in previous research. The results support the importance of motivation in assisting injured athletes in returning to sport successfully. It is critical to note that most athletes returning to sport may do so prematurely due to others' expectations on themselves although they were not fully mentally prepared to return to sport due to their fear and concerns of performing at peak performance again.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the respondents of this study for their cooperation. We would also like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Sports and Exercise Science Department of Tunku Abdul Rahman University College for their support in this research.

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