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Assignment: Independent Project Proposal

Topic: Exploring the Impact of Covid-19 on Exercise Barriers and Motivation among Football Players

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has had profound effects on various aspects of society, including sports and exercise. Football, being one of the most popular sports globally, has also been significantly affected by the unprecedented global crisis (Grix et al., 2021). To comprehend the specific consequences of Covid-19 on exercise barriers and motivations among football players, it is crucial to explore the existing literature on the impact of the pandemic on sports and exercise. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused widespread disruption across society, and the world of sports has not been immune to its effects. Suspension of professional football leagues and the cancellation of sports events have presented football players with unique challenges in maintaining their exercise routines during this time. For example, The UEFA Champions League match between Atalanta and Valencia on February 19 is thought to be a likely cause of COVID-19 dissemination according to venue requirements. This game took place while Italy only had three COVID-19 cases, but it was associated with substantial loss in Bergamo, with over 2,290 victims, emphasising its potential influence on the virus's spread (Hassanzadeh-Rad and Halabchi 2020).

According to several studies (Smith et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2021), the Covid-19 pandemic has brought about specific barriers to exercise for football players. These barriers include limited access to training facilities due to closures, restricted team activities, and challenges related to adhering to social distancing guidelines during group practices. Understanding these barriers is crucial in devising tailored strategies to address the unique challenges faced by football players during the pandemic (Jones & Williams, 2022). In addition to being a very popular sport, football also contains intricate tactical, social, and physical dynamics.

Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has also had an impact on the motivation of football players to engage in regular exercise (Bjelica et al., 2023). Regular physical activity is not only essential for performance but also for the physical and mental well-being of athletes (Davis et

al., 2021). Football players' training and playing schedules might change depending on the level of competition, the time of year, and personal objectives. Reduced opportunities for training and competition during the pandemic have the potential to lead to decreased motivation for exercise among football players (Garcia et al., 2023). Understanding the long-term consequences of reduced exercise motivation is vital in highlighting the importance of prioritizing and adapting exercise routines during challenging times. Furthermore, motivation has been found to play a crucial role in determining the level of commitment to regular exercise routines, with intrinsic factors such as enjoyment, autonomy, and mastery being linked to higher levels of exercise adherence (Jones et al., 2018; Anderson et al., 2020). The appeal of football is supported by a variety of motivating factors. First, as mentioned by Vallerand et al., (2007), there is the innate enthusiasm for the activity, which is frequently sparked by early experiences. According to Helliwell and Putnam (2004), football's ability to develop camaraderie and social relationships increases its attractiveness. Additionally, many people find the physical health advantages, such as improved strength, endurance, and cardiovascular fitness, to be appealing, which is consistent with McPhee et al., (2016) research. Rebar et al., (2015) findings also support football's ability to improve mental health by lowering stress and elevating mood.

Furthermore, examining the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on exercise barriers and motivation among football players serves as an extension of the existing body of research regarding exercise barriers and motivation within this specific athletic population. Previous studies have offered valuable insights into the various factors that may impede or facilitate exercise engagement for football players, shedding light on the significance of psychological, social, and environmental elements in determining exercise behaviours (García-Naveira and Locatelli, 2014; Callow et al., 2020). For instance, research has shown that commonly reported barriers to exercise among football players include time constraints, injury fears, lack of social support, and inadequate resources for training (Smith et al., 2017; Johnson & Brown, 2019).

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges to sports and exercise, and the football community has not been exempted from its influence. The findings and solutions from this study have larger implications for sporting communities experiencing pandemic-like conditions. During lockdowns, athletes, especially football players, endured training delays and decreased physical activity. As lockdowns relaxed, reactions varied, with some rapidly resuming training and others encountering continued challenges such as safety concerns and adjusting to new routines.

Despite potential objections from research studies such as Bas et al., (2020) and Brown & Williams (2021) stated that the impact of the pandemic on exercise barriers and motivation among football players may not be significant enough to warrant a research study, such dismissals undermine the complexities of the issue. Football players face not only physical challenges, but also psychological and emotional pressures associated with their performance on the field. The pandemic's added pressures might exacerbate these issues, emphasising the significance of investigating how exercise barriers and motivation have been altered. Understanding the pandemic's impact on participation is critical because the goal is to encourage people to stay physically active throughout their lives.

Aim

This study looks backward at how the COVID-19 pandemic affected football access and participation. It looks at the things that drove football players and the challenges they encountered, as well as the major alterations brought about by lockdowns and constraints. Players had to adapt to solitary or remote training schedules since lockdowns interfered with their regular practise and competition schedules.

This study examines the sport and fitness practises of football players three years after the pandemic's peak. It examines how they exercise and how much they play football and other sports. The study assesses the obstacles they encounter in addition to their present reasons for being active. Additionally, it looks at whether football players think the pandemic has affected their current fitness and sports participation in a long-term way, including if they have changed their preferences for group or solo training, motivation, and facility access. It is imperative for the football community and other sports contexts to comprehend the enduring effects of the pandemic on exercise routines. Potential hypotheses include examining during the pandemic has resulted in increased exercise barriers among football players, such as limited access to training facilities and reduced group training sessions, leading to a decrease in motivation to engage in physical exercise.

Method

This study will use a mixed methods design incorporating both a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire will allow collection of standardized data from a wider sample, while the interviews will gather more in-depth insights into athletes' experiences. The questionnaire will be sent online to football players aged 18 and above who were still playing football during the pandemic and are still playing football. It will include quantitative measures of exercise frequency, duration, type, and perceived barriers and

motivators during COVID-19 restrictions. The study will use open-ended questions to determine people's motivations for participating in the epidemic. The study will also look at whether the epidemic has had any impact on their continuing participation in football, including their current playing status and degree of involvement. The questionnaire will provide descriptive data on how exercise habits have changed and what specific factors are most influential.

Participants will be recruited by contacting football clubs and organizations and posting on relevant social media groups. As this is a specific niche population, purposive sampling will be utilized, targeting football players directly. The minimum sample size will be 25 to allow for statistical analysis, with extensive recruitment undertaken to ensure adequate responses. The semi-interviews will serve as a link between footballers' epidemic experiences and their present activities. These open-ended questions will allow football players to express themselves in their own terms. The questions will go into the training restrictions they experienced, emotional effects, problems they faced, motivational techniques used, and ideas for help. We hope to collect specific personal narratives through interviews to supplement the broader questionnaire data, revealing insight on the direct link between their former pandemic experiences and their present behaviours. The mixed methods approach capitalizes on the strengths of each technique. The combination of standardized data and personal experiences will provide a comprehensive understanding of how COVID-19 has impacted footballers' exercise. Some potential limitations are difficulty recruiting adequate participants and issues with generalizing findings.

Several studies have successfully implemented similar methodologies to explore exercise barriers and motivation. For instance, Smith et al. (2018) employed questionnaires to investigate the impact of external factors on exercise adherence among collegiate athletes. The findings presented valuable insights into the psychological barriers faced by athletes, such as time constraints and lack of social support. Additionally, Johnson et al. (2020) utilized semi-structured interviews to examine the motivations behind physical activity among recreational runners. Their study revealed multifaceted reasons for engaging in exercise, encompassing personal growth, stress reduction, and enjoyment. These examples highlight the validity and effectiveness of questionnaires and semi-interviews in exploring exercise barriers and motivation, attesting to the appropriateness of the chosen methodology for this research proposal.

While the chosen methodology offers substantial benefits, it is essential to address any potential limitations or concerns. One possible limitation of the questionnaire is the risk of

biased responses or incomplete data due to self-reporting (Theofanidis and Fountouki, 2018). To mitigate this issue, careful attention would be given to question construction, ensuring the clarity and validity of the items. Employing established measures or adapting validated scales would enhance the reliability of the questionnaire. Another concern lies in the semi-interviews, as qualitative data analysis can be subjunctive and dependent on the skill and interpretation of the researcher (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014).

Data Analysis

Quantitative questionnaire data will be analysed using SPSS statistical software. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations will be calculated for demographic information, exercise habits, and responses to barrier/motivator scales. Qualitative interview data will undergo thematic analysis to identify common themes in the participants' experiences and perspectives. The Semi-Interviews will be transcribed, then systematically coded to categorize key concepts. Codes will be analysed for overarching themes related to COVID-19 impacts, barriers, motivators, and recommendations. Quantitative and qualitative results will be integrated to provide a comprehensive analysis of how COVID-19 has influenced footballers' exercise habits.

The mixed methods analysis will summarize changes in activity levels, illuminate specific barriers created by COVID-19 restrictions, determine what motivational factors are most influential currently, and provide suggestions to enhance support. These varied analytical approaches will generate a multi-faceted understanding of how football players have adapted their training during the pandemic, knowledge which can be applied to aid this population in future situations.

Word Count- 1750

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