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Educating and Construing the Lived Experiences of Athletes of South Cotabato in the New Normal: Proposed Intervention

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of athletes of South Cotabato in the new normal. This study was done: (1) to determine the challenges of the athletes, (2) to highlight the positive responses in the situation, (3) to introduce a new framework to cope with the new normal. This study is viewed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic which is best applied as athletes transition to the new normal. It employed a qualitative research design relatively with the phenomenological approach which includes multiple online in-depth interviews from five participants. The result showed that there is a decrease in the level of physical activities engaged of which is rooted in the number of challenges that athletes are experiencing. Furthermore, significant findings explained the ways of how athletes can cope up, with mobile games as a stress reliever, increased attention in home-based training, increased value in academics, strengthened family relationships, and rest. We also developed a sustainability program that assists coaches, trainers, and parents in monitoring the athletes' well-being during the quarantine period. The study concluded that it has resulted in some negative effects on the athletes' bodies and in the development of their skills. However, there have been emergent opportunities for positive takeaways, as well. This study provides a framework for athletes and coaches to maintain optimal performance in the new normal.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The global COVID-19 outbreak has forced the closure of gyms, stadiums, dancing and fitness studios, and playgrounds (Maugeri et al., 2020). Many people are unable to participate in regular solo or group sporting activities when they are not at home.

The COVID-19 epidemic had a substantial impact on sports performance in the Philippines, affecting both competitive and recreational sports leagues and competitions. As a result, players were compelled to make rapid modifications to their training regimens, leaving little time for coaches, strength and conditioning specialists, or athletes to develop a long-term strategy (Jagim et al., 2020). Long-term detraining has also been shown to cause a considerable reduction in maximal oxygen consumption, a loss of previously gained endurance capacity, and, most importantly, a loss of muscle strength and bulk (Paoli & Bianco, 2015). As a result, the athletes' health and performance have been compromised. Increased time spent playing video games, talking on the phone, or reading could result in mental tiredness, which is the same as physical exhaustion (Barbosa et al., 2020). Furthermore, special concerns for athletes' mental health during the lockdown were observed, including the difficulty in maintaining training conditions, social isolation from teammates, and anxiety (Pons et al., 2020).

Propelled by these reasons, we conducted this phenomenological study to determine and understand the experiences of athletes in South Cotabato. Furthermore, to assess what adversities they have faced and how athletes deal with them.

2. METHOD

The method in this study uses a qualitative research design relatively with the phenomenological approach. The phenomenological design focuses on individuals who raise awareness of light experiences retrospectively, and we work to gain meaning and significance from experience. This study was conducted through a semi-structured interview technique. It required a virtual interview of the participants using audio recording instruments, online platforms and simultaneously using note-taking techniques. Three steps were employed in data analysis after the study, which are data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The goal of this data analysis is to create themes, terms, thoughts, or patterns that can bring a deeper understanding of the issue the problem as there is a rich explanation of the result of the lived experiences of athletes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Adversity of Athletes

Several themes have emerged based on the responses of the participants from the in-depth interview. In terms of adversities encountered, the major theme that emerged is the Decrease Level of Engaged Physical Activities as presented in the table below. In most of the cases, participants answered that ***“I am not healthy because I am less likely to engage in physical activity, I easily get tired”***, at the same time participants answered that ***“I don't mind my exercise and I don't exercise to be specific, unlike before that I am active in sports. And I easily get tired.”***

Therefore, as supported by the study of Andreato et al, (2020), another point to consider is that the detraining period can induce an increase in both body mass and body fat mass. Thus, this should be considered, since in addition to body fat has a negative association with physical performance (Table 1).

Table 1. Adversities of athletes in the new normal.

Clustered Themes	Major Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting easily tired • Not conditioned body • Unaccustomed to the current situation • Low skill level • Increased weight • Laziness and unmotivated 	Decreased level of engaging physical activities

3.2. Coping mechanism of athletes

While the current situation has presented several challenges for athletes, there have been positive takeaways as well. The themes that emerged in the coping mechanism of athletes were presented in the table below.

There is an increase of mobile games playtime to cope with stresses as two of the participants mentioned that *“I enjoyed playing the online games”, “I downloaded mobile games which is relevant to my sport. I just imagine that I am the one who is playing.”* Participants said they utilized video games for emotional coping, stress reduction, relaxation, and alleviation of mental health concerns, in addition to seeking an escape during the pandemic and as a kind of entertainment (Ellis et al., 2020). There is also increased attention in home-based training as most of the athletes answered that *“I tried to adjust, and that I do homework out”, “I engaged myself on a home workout that I know.”* As stated in the study of Lim & Pranata (2021), athletes and certain people train individually to keep themselves fit and healthy.

In addition to this, participants also commonly answered that with home confinement brought by the current situation, they can more time spending with their family as they stated that *“the positive effect for me is that I used to spend time with my family”* similar on the study of Elliott et al. (2021). Furthermore, the pandemic highlighted that the time spent on sport is often at the expense of time with one’s academic, as athletes were to focus and increased value in academics *“I am going to focus on my studies, because back then I don’t give so much importance to it, What I think about is training”*. The lockdown allowed them to focus on other tasks, such as continuing with their studies online (Odriozola-González, et al., 2020).

Lastly, due to the cancellation of training and sporting events athletes were able to rest, as they share a common answer *“Somehow, there is positive effect because I was able to take a break from the training”* as supported by the study of Ding et al. (2020), the pandemic provided a time for a break, which allowed the participants to rest, recover, and discover new interests (Table 2).

Table 2. Coping mechanisms of athletes.

Clustered Themes	Major Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time in using gadgets • Doing home workouts and monitored training • More time with family • Focus on studies • Able to find time to rest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile Games as Stress Reliever • Increased attention in home-based training • Strengthened family relationship • Increased value in academics • Rest

3.3. Sustainability program framework

Based on the result of the study, it emerged that a sustainability program is in need to help students maintain and improve their skills needed in their specific sports. With the benefit we can derive from this program initiative, we proposed this sustainability program (Figure 1).

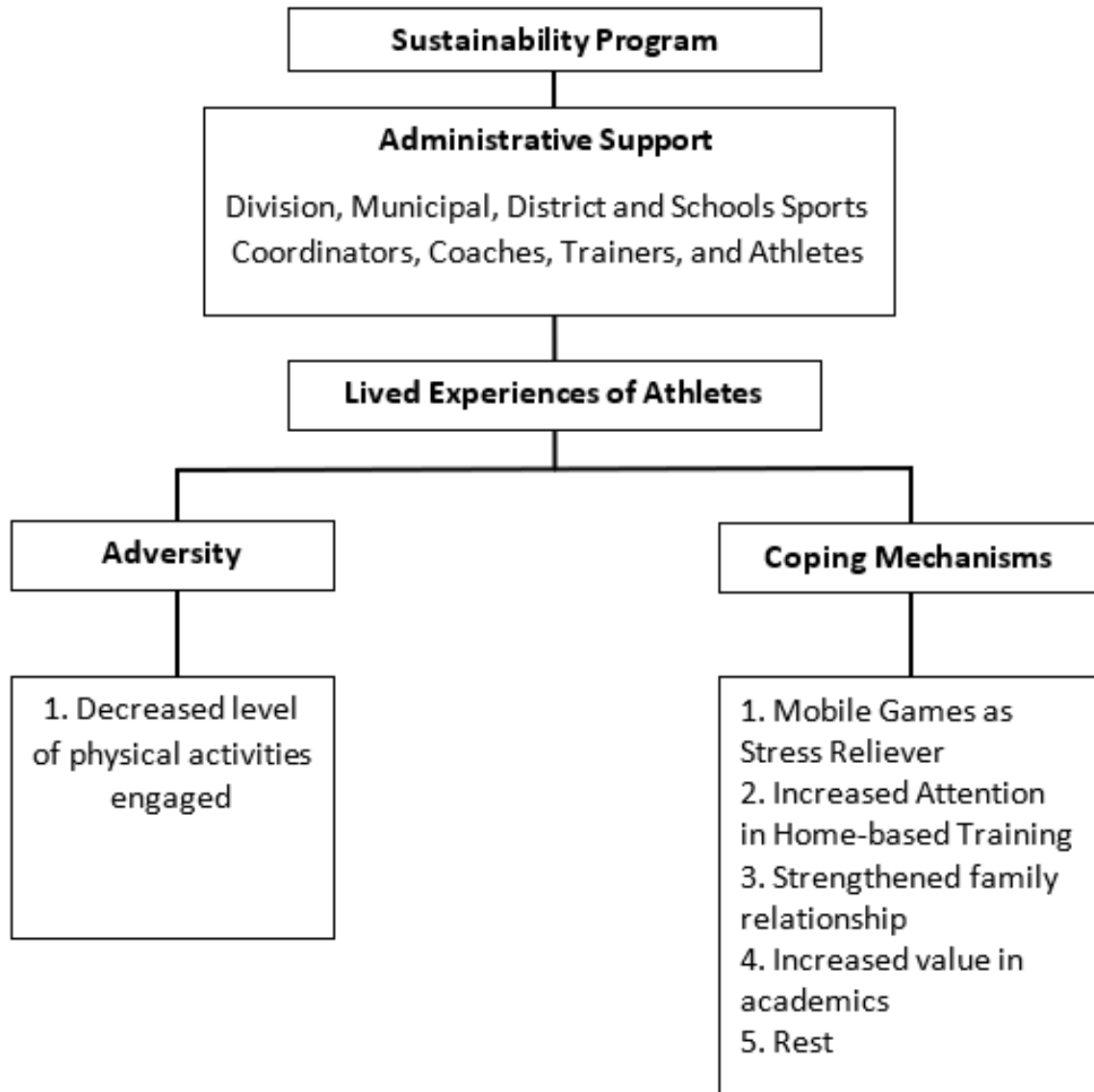


Figure 1. Summary of this study.

4. CONCLUSION

The participants were able to share their early experiences at the onset of the pandemic of which impacted what they are now. Therefore, the participants shared significant aspects of their lived experiences. This study concluded that the decreased level of engaging physical activities is the adversity that was faced by athletes due to being inactive in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, there are significant findings of coping mechanisms that have emerged that truly helped athletes to overcome their situation.

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6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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