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## **An Overview of Young Athlete Needs and Perceptions on Sports Psychology Services**

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### **Abstract**

Sport psychology research and practice in Indonesia have grown immensely, yet the research on teenage athlete perception on their need for sports psychology services is limited. This research was intended to understand young athlete needs and perceptions on sports psychology services. The qualitative approach was conducted for this research. The researcher interviewed twelve young badminton athletes aged 16-17 years ( $\pm 16,5$ ) to understand their needs and perceptions of sports psychology services. The analysis used was the analysis of interview transcript and the search of the similar results as main data. The results showed that the participants had demonstrated the intention to receive sports psychology services from sports psychology practitioners to optimize their sports performance. However, they had not had any specific concept, expectation, or perception of the kinds of support they could receive from a sport psychology practitioner and services.

## INTRODUCTION

Psychological aspects, such as counselling, intervention, and psychological skill training (PST), have been proven to help athletes improve their performance on the field (Weinberg & Gould, 2018). In Indonesia, research on improving a professional athlete performance through counselling (Sin, 2019), intervention (Herdinata et al., 2016; Setyawati, 2014), and psychological skill training (Anggoro et al., 2016; Juriana & Tahki, 2017) has been conducted. The rapid development of sports psychology has encouraged athletes, coaches, and management to realize the importance of the athlete psychological aspects when competing. The provision of counselling, intervention, and PST can be carried out by mental coaches, sports psychology practitioners, and sports psychologists.

Rahayuni (2016), in her research, describes three professions related to sports psychology. The first one is a mental coach. Mental coach is a person owning a background in sports science, coaching, and psychology who has expertise and competence in the fields of coaching, sports science, sports psychology, and the sports they accompany. The second one is a Sports Psychology Practitioner. Similar with the definition of a mental coach, sports psychology practitioners are people who have received a bachelor degree in psychology and have competence in the same field as mental coaches. And the last professional terminology is a sports psychologist. Slightly different from sports psychology practitioners, sports psychologists obtain their professional master degree in adult clinical, child clinical, education, or industry. In addition to their title as a psychologist, they are experts and having experience in assisting athletes. In this research, the three professions are abbreviated as Sports Psychology Practitioner (SPP).

SPP accompanies athletes according to the needs of the athletes or the management (Winter & Collins, 2016). SPP collaborates with coaches and administrators to assist professional athletes in national and international competitions to improve their performance. This is in line with the statement of Alexandra et al. (2020) that the science of sports psychology is easier to apply by professional athletes. However, according to Alexandra research, it would also have implications for the amount of research and innovation in the area of sports psychology to be limited to professional athletes.

Research on SPP services for professional athletes in Indonesia has been carried out by exploring the Prospects of Psychological Service Needs for Jaya Raya Athletes (Soerjoatmodjo et al., 2017). This research was conducted on the club administrators, coaches, and athletes. However, they had not explicitly explored the perception on SPP services needed by athletes, especially adolescent athletes. Research with adolescent athlete participants is necessary because an athlete success in reaching the professional level can be predicted when the athlete is an adolescent (Fontana et al., 2017; Boccia et al., 2017).

Adolescent athletes have different characteristic in compare with elite athletes both in psychical (von Rosen et al., 2019) and psychological aspects (Morris et al., 2017; Stambulova et al., 2021; Kardi, 2019). Different needs between adolescent and professional athletes also arise because individuals experience various physical, cognitive, social, career, and environmental changes during this age (Côté et al., 2007; Santrock, 2013). The changes experienced in adolescence can affect the sports experience of adolescent athletes (Knight et al., 2016). In the career aspect, adolescent athletes are also often referred to as student-athletes who must balance their roles as athletes and students (Papaioannou & Hackfort (2014). Therefore, Henriksen et al., (2014) suggest that an intervention and treatment of mental aspects involving professional athletes and adolescent athletes should be different since they have different characteristics.

Henriksen et al., (2014) study also examined major themes of the adolescent athlete psychological needs, which were pretty contrasting with the needs of professional athletes, including: (a) adolescent athletes had to be equipped with holistic skills that enable them to deal with several common existential challenges in adolescence; (b) interventions carried out on adolescent athletes should involve the coaching team, teammates, and other relevant parties; and (c) interventions with adolescent athletes should maintain a long-term focus.

In addition to the psychological needs mentioned above, assisting athletes to achieve their best performance through intervention and PST can be done by an SPP through counselling, consultation, and intervention (Rahayuni, 2016). Thelwell et al., (2017) showed an example of a program providing an overview of the perceptions of parents and trainers on the services of-

ferred by SPP. Parents and coaches understood that the presence of SPP could influence an athlete performance, increase psychological strength, and help athletes understand the things needed to become professional athletes. However, the data from the study showed that parents also had different views about the scope of SPP work related to the development of adolescent athletes and their well-being. Of course, this does not necessarily indicate that the coach does not see the potential of SPP in helping the development of a teenage athlete. Still, the coach is more focused on examining the ability of an SPP to improve their athlete performance.

Research on perceptions on sports psychology services in Malaysia concluded that athletes had several preferences in getting assistance from SPP (Ponnusamy & Jackson, 2013). Athletes preferred a one-on-one service compared to groups. Athletes also chose to conduct consultations with themes that the coach and management had determined for themselves. However, athletes preferred performance optimization themes rather than themes on improving their well-being.

Both researches showed the importance of SPP for young athletes. Thus, this study aimed to explore the perceptions of adolescent athletes in Indonesia regarding the services provided by SPP to the athletes. To examine young Indonesian athlete needs on SPP services, The Youth Sport Consulting Model/YSCM was used. The model was used because it was designed specifically for young athletes with complete steps from initiation to termination (Visek et al., 2009). YSCM is a sports psychology service model divided into phases that conceptualizes the planning, implementation, and evaluation steps needed to work effectively with youth sports teams.

YSCM integrates several existing approaches with the addition of special considerations for youth. Phase I includes practitioner considerations that encourage practitioners to explore their professional boundaries and philosophies in determining their abilities and interests in working with specific populations. Phase II is initiating contact, where the SPP contacts the client, demonstrates credibility, and develops a potential service plan. Phase III involves sport psychology which focuses on determining and delivering session by paying attention to confidentiality, evaluation, observation during practice and matches, the ability to select, apply

and process, and the time required for a break in sport psychology. Phase IV is wrapping up the session and consultation, which includes how to end the season and evaluate consultations. Phase V is assessing the consulting relationship and using the evaluation results that have been owned. Phase VI is termination and continuation, which allows sports psychology services outside of the match season and SPP considerations to return to sports psychology services from phase II.

According to the description above, examining young athlete needs and perceptions on sports psychology services from SPP is essential. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine a young athlete need from SPP.

## METHODS

To capture the uniqueness of data related to the perception of adolescent athletes in Indonesia on sports psychology services according to the research objectives previously mentioned, qualitative research with a narrative exploration method was carried out. Narrative research focuses on studying one/two individuals and collecting data through a collection of stories to be reported by sequencing the meaning of the individual, as the subject of research, experiences (Nathan et al., 2019). Narrative studies begin with experiences expressed in stories that are lived and told by the research subject. This research produces and processes descriptive data and explores the views and experiences of the participated subjects.

### Participants

Because this study was the first study in Indonesia that formally examined the perceptions of adolescent athletes on the services provided by SPP, the selection of participants in this study used the convenience sampling technique. The population of this study were teenage badminton athletes who were members of a club in West Java aged 16-17 years who had never received sports psychology services and were willing to participate in this study.

### Data Collection Technique

Data collection techniques were carried out with semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and research on written documents, such as meeting notes with psychologists. The interview structure adapted The

Youth Sport Consulting Model consisting of six phases. However, because this study examined an overview of sports psychology services, the question framework was based on phases one to four, namely Practitioner Consideration, Initiating Contact, Doing Sport Psychology, and Wrapping Up The Session and Consultation (Vissek et al., 2009). The data collection process through interviews and observations were carried out in one day for 45 minutes to 60 minutes without the presence of a third party.

### Data Analysis Technique

This study used thematic data analysis as suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006). The analysis started with transcribing the interview data in the form of verbatim, followed by coding, namely giving comments or interpretations on the original data by writing words, phrases, or short sentences in the right margin. The coding results were then categorized into several topic groups and labeled with the name of the sub-theme. All identified sub-themes were further categorized into several main theme groups. Data analysis was carried out on a case-by-case basis.

## RESULT

### Participants

Research participants comprised four female and eight male athletes with an average age of 16.3 years. Participants had been pursuing badminton since childhood. On average, they had been playing badminton for approximately 8.5 years. All participants competed in the cadet age group. Almost all of participants competed in doubles. Some of the participants had also won various championships at the regional and national levels. In 2022, the badminton club recruited an SPP to provide mentoring services. SPP had never accompanied all participants during their careers. Still, on the day of interview, participants took part in psychological tests carried out by SPP, which the club had appointed.

### Interview Results

#### *Phase I: Practitioner Consideration*

Phase one of The Youth Sport Consulting Model discussed the essential things that need to be considered by an SPP before doing sports psychology services, such as the needs of athletes to get benefits. In addition

to a description of the athlete needs, the athlete expectations regarding the characteristics of the SPP were also explored through questions about preferences for educational background, occupation, sports experience, gender, and age of SPP. One of the participants illustrated his perception on SPP, “*SPP is a person who can listen to my story and what I feel. I prefer woman in her mid 30 as the SPP. A well-educated person with psychology background and understands my sports.*”

In addition to the interview result from one of the participants, the needs of athletes to get services from SPP were diverse. Seven out of twelve participants answered that they already wished to get benefits from SPP. The topics to be discussed include:

- Motivation in training and competition
- Increasing focus during training and competition
- Family issues
- Mental health issues

Meanwhile, other five participants answered that they did not yet need to get services from an SPP. The interviews showed that four out of twelve participants had no idea about what characteristics a Sports Psychology Practitioner should have or who would treat them. Five out of twelve participants said that SPP should undergo formal education related to psychology and sports. According to six participants, having experience in sports as an athlete and understanding badminton should be present in an SPP.

Only two participants mentioned gender preference of SPP, while the rest did not have a specific opinion about the gender of an SPP. In addition to gender, age preferences were also asked. Five participants answered that, at least, the SPP was in the late 20s to 30s. One participant did not specify the SPP age but preferred if the SPP age was close to his age. The other six participants did not have a particular preference regarding the age of an SPP.

In this phase, athletes needed to seek help from SPP through questions about their needs to use sports psychology services. Five participants once felt the need to ask for help from SPP. Four people never felt the need to ask for help from SPP even though they had problems, such as declining performance or suicidal ideation. The other three people never needed to ask for help from SPP because they could not imagine or feel better talking to a friend or coach if they had a problem.

### *Phase II: Initiating Contact*

Phase two of The Youth Sport Consulting Model focused on SPP introduction and initial approach to athletes. Six out of twelve participants wished they could have direct contact with SPP without going through intermediaries, such as coaches, management, or parents. While the remaining six hoped that the coach could first bridge the communication between athletes and SPP. Athletes who wanted the process of approaching and meeting with SPP without intermediaries also hoped that the sessions were relaxed and the SPP could make them feel comfortable.

### *Phase III: Doing Sport Psychology*

Phase three of The Youth Sport Consulting Model was the core process of the services provided by an SPP. SPP was expected to provide services to athletes according to their needs and abilities. SPP should conduct a need assessment before delivering appropriate services to the athletes. It was also necessary to know the characteristics of the athletes being treated.

Before carrying out the interview process, participants completed a series of psychological tests conducted by SPP. This was aimed to explore the needs of athletes in the third phase. Athletes were then asked how they felt after undergoing a series of tests, information about the tests, and what tests they would need in the future. Feelings after taking the test included confusion and dizziness because they were not used to doing the test. In addition to being confused and dizzy, some participants also felt tense when doing the test for fear of giving unexpected answers. All participants did not know the purpose and benefits they got from taking the test, so they had no idea what psychological test they needed.

After carrying out the psychological examination, six participants hoped that the psychological examination report could be given alongside the counselling session, while four participants wanted a written report. The other two participants did not answer.

Regarding the service process provided by SPP, ten out of twelve participants felt comfortable if the service was carried out individually. The remaining two participants had no idea about the service process carried out by an SPP. There were three categories of parties who were allowed to know the process of sports psychology services undertaken by participants. The

participant answers consisted of either one category or several categories. Ten participants let their parents know about the sports psychology services they were undergoing. Seven participants allowed the coach to know, while four participants allowed friends to know about the sports psychology services they were experiencing. Two participants did not let anyone know about their sports psychology services.

Various answers emerged regarding the disclosure of sports psychology services received and private details shared with the SPP. Three participants felt that everything could be disclosed to coaches, parents, and club administrators. Seven participants expected only general things to be told to others. One thought sports psychology service was so personal that they did not let others know about it. One participant chose not to answer. Eight participants hoped that before getting services from an SPP, the SPP first knew and understood their character, background, and daily life. Four participants did not expect anything from the SPP before providing sports psychology services.

Providing comfort during the services was also an essential thing for an SPP to do. Research participants provided an overview of their need for ease in carrying out services, such as activities that could be done to lighten the atmosphere. Three participants hoped to chat comfortably with the SPP before getting services so they could be more open when obtaining services from the SPP. Two participants also said that they wanted to get encouragement and motivational words from the SPP. Two participants wanted the services provided by the SPP to be carried out in a closed room involving only athletes and the SPP in the room. One participant stated that his comfort would appear if he already needed to come to an SPP. The other four participants did not know how comfortable they felt when receiving services from the SPP.

The time for SPP mentoring was also the content explored in the third phase. Five out of twelve participants felt that the presence of SPP when practicing or competing was not crucial for various reasons, including feeling that they did not need an SPP when practicing or competing and feeling embarrassed or wanting to communicate only after a training session or after a match. Three participants felt that an SPP presence during the competition was only significant to encourage them. One participant thought that the presence of an

SPP was only crucial during practice so that participants could focus when competing. Two participants felt that an SPP presence was significant when practicing and competing to see the participant progress. One participant did not answer this question. There were two major categories related to expectations in the provision of sports psychology services: the characteristics of the SPP and the services provided by the SPP. Two participants hope that an SPP would provide relaxing and easy to get along sports psychology services. Eight participants expected to receive benefits, such as mental training, consultation, and mentoring sessions, while the remaining two participants did not provide any opinion.

#### *Phase IV: Wrapping Up the Session and Consultation*

The end of the SPP service process can be due to various things, such as the end of the SPP contract or the end of the match season, so it is essential to know how the process takes place based on the expectations of the athletes. Phase four of The Youth Sport Consulting Model was explored through questions about athlete expectations after being accompanied by an SPP. Six out of twelve participants had no idea of expectations after the session with the SPP was over. Four participants hoped that they would become better athletes in competitions. In comparison, other two participants hoped that their relationship with SPP would not just break up but continue to communicate on an ongoing basis.

In addition to athlete expectations, to explore the fourth phase, questions about the best way to provide feedback to SPP were also asked. Seven out of twelve participants felt that direct delivery, both oral and written, was the best way. However, three participants preferred providing feedback anonymously through written messages or the coach. The other two participants had no idea about this feedback mechanism.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of the study showed that there was limited knowledge about SPP services in Indonesia. The result is in contrast with what already applied in Europe since 2005 (Sanchez et al., 2005) and USA (Zakrajsek et al., 2013). It might happen because all participants had never known and received psychological services from SPP. Thus, participants had not been able to pro-

vide further descriptions of the details of services and characteristics of SPP that could assist them professionally. However, participants indicated the need to get assistance from an SPP. The problems that they would like to discuss to an SPP included motivation during practice and competition, how to increase focus during training and matches, family problems, and mental health problems (such as suicidal thought).

Handling a mental health problem seemed to be a service needed by adolescent athletes. According to research by Xanthopoulos et al., (2020) adolescent athletes are at risk of experiencing mental health disorders, such as anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, eating disorders, body image, substance abuse, and bullying. The form of service desired by teenage athletes was an individual service, but they also did not mind if they had to do activities with other athletes in their sport.

The confidentiality of the sports psychology service process was also a topic studied in this study. Adolescent athletes assumed that there were parties who were allowed and not allowed to know the process of sports psychology services they took. Most participants did not feel comfortable if the issues discussed in sports psychology services were notified to outside parties, such as parents, coaches, or other parties.

In initiating the service process, teenage athletes hoped the SPP could make direct contact with them, not through coaches or parents. An SPP should also have a description of their adolescent athletes, including their characters and sports experiences, before providing sports psychology services. When the psychological examination or intervention was carried out, adolescent athletes hoped to get information about their self-improvement results through individual counselling.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study indicates that adolescent badminton athletes, who became the research participants, needed to get sports psychology assistance services. Participants hoped that mentoring could be done individually but did not mind if there were psychological services carried out with colleagues or in groups. However, the participants did not have a further description of the service details and the SPP characteristics that could assist them professionally.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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