

Training needs of judo practitioners regarding sport psychology

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Key words: sport psychology, children and young people's sport, judo

Summary

Introduction. Nowadays, cooperation of a sports person with a sport psychologist should be a standard practice, adopted already at the level of children and young people's sport. Thus, what are the experiences of young people regarding cooperation with a sport psychologist? Do they know what such a specialist deals with? How do they imagine possible cooperation with him/her? The objective of the research was to diagnose the needs of sport practitioners in the area of sport psychology. The aim of the paper and the author's research was to analyse the awareness of the place of psychology in sport of children and youth, as well as the need for mental training.

Material and methods. The research covered 72 young Polish judo practitioners – 26 girls and 46 boys. The respondents were of various age and presented different levels of sport abilities. They were participants of international judo competitions for children and youth.

Results. The majority of the respondents have not worked with a sport psychologist and do not know the scope of his or her professional competence. Moreover, almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the respondents do not express the need for such cooperation. However, the analysis of selected areas in sport (especially differences in subjective experiences and behaviour at training and competitions) indicates that there are fields where urgent specialist intervention is required.

Conclusions. The analysis of the results leads to the conclusion about the need to introduce preventive, educational and intervention measures, implemented simultaneously among children and young people practising sport, as well as among their coaches, parents and sport peer groups.

Introduction

Professionalization, commercialization and the resulting increasing pressure on athletes to obtain better and better results are the factors which, in competitive sports of nowadays, should be accompanied by a humanistic approach, implemented, inter alia, in sports psychology [1,2]. The increasing role of sports psychologists, individualized training programs and mental training, being the integral components of athlete training, help the trainees develop specific mental and/or social skills, enabling improvement of mental resistance, optimal adaptation to changing conditions, improvement of the quality of life and high level performance, not only in terms of sport, during their athletic career and later in life [3,4,5].

It seems that the necessity of using holistic approaches due to the intensity and diversity of the trends in human development is particularly true in case of children and youth involved in sports. Being aware of multiple adverse effects of a contemporary sport [6], specialists from various fields (mainly trainers and coaches, but also psychologists sports physi-

cians, ect.) should cooperate effectively. Moreover, they should take into account not only sports results, but also maintaining and using the development potential, personality-determining value of sports, respect for health according to holistic approaches and education "through"/"for" physical culture including sports [7,8,9]. It seems that at the level of children's and youth's participation in sports, parents' participation is invaluable. All these processes cannot take place in isolation. To emphasise the athlete's subjectivity a continuous dialog and knowledge of their needs are required. This study as well as its outcome is an attempt to emphasise the necessity of recognising the needs of youth athletes and adapting the measures, of course within the implemented programs of sport training. The sample of youth beginner judo practitioners were invited to take part in the study.

Apart from physical fitness, judo requires mental acuity as the competitors during the fight can only count on themselves and their mental and social skills. This discipline is popular among children and youth, also because, compared with other sports, it results in relatively few injuries [8,10].

Material and methods

The study was carried out in 2011 during the international judo championships for children and youth. 72 persons including 26 girls and 46 boys participated in the study. All the subjects were from Poland. The competitors were aged 11-18 years ($M=12.93$, $SD=1.70$). They trained at least 6 months, but no longer than 9 years ($M=3.46$, $SD=1.92$), at least 1.5 hours and no more than 15 hours a week ($M=6.20$, $SD=2.75$). Most of the subjects (47%) had a yellow belt while the rest had a white (7%), orange (29%) and green belt (17%). The subjects individually filled in the author's questionnaire containing 8 questions allowing to recognise their selected needs (open – reported and hidden- the subjects were unaware of) within the range of sports psychology.

Results

A vast majority ($N=66$) of the studied athletes had never worked with a sport psychologist in their sport career. A slightly smaller group ($N=61$) did not know what sports psychologists dealt with. Among the subjects ($N=11$) who admitted they knew the tasks of sports psychologists, most of the answers were: "they help athletes", "they help with problems", "they help fighting with pressure and stress" and "they talk with athletes". Among the subjects who admitted they did not know what sport psychologists dealt with, 22 respondents would like to broaden their knowledge in this field, 21 respondents were not interested and the rest had no opinion. Every third respondent (31% of the sample) would like to start cooperating with a sport psychologist in the future. They explained they would like the psychologist to "underpin/de-stress" them, "help overcome stress", "examine to check if everything is OK" and "be helpful in solving problems". Other statements were the following: „as psychics is important in 80% in sports" and "you can always learn something". In this group, 3 subjects would like to cooperate with a psychologist on a regular basis and 2 subjects – from time to time. The rest would like to cooperate with a psychologist occasionally or "only if needed". Most of the respondents declaring their readiness for

cooperation with a psychologist reported they would devote 2 hours weekly for sessions with a psychologist; for the whole sample ($N=22$) – $M=2.23$, $SD=1.41$ (Fig. 1).

Some competitors who do not want to cooperate with a psychologist explained their decision in the following ways' „because I don't know what they deal with, „I don' feel like", „I have no time for such things", „I don't need it" or „I'm not interested".

The subjects were asked to assess their level of satisfaction (using the scale of school grades) with basic areas of participation in sports – training and competitions. The score distribution (different from the theoretic normal distribution, confirmed by Z values of Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test is presented in Fig. 2.

The value of Wilcoxon signed rank test ($Z=-3.52$, $p\leq 0.01$) allows to conclude that the subjects are more satisfied with training than with participation in competitions. It is also confirmed by the score distribution presented in the above table.

The youth beginner judo practitioners were also asked whether they experienced any problems – separately – during the training and during the competition. Comparison of the categories is presented below (Fig. 3).

The categories were formed based on the subjects' written opinions. In case of several subjects who chose more than one answer, the first choice was taken into consideration. This allowed to maintain proportions and compare the answer categories in the "training" and "competition" section. For the "exercise" and "fight" category such answers were qualified as: "difficult grapple/throw/contra", "bad position" or "poor tilt". For the "competition" category such answers were qualified as: "jitters", "psychical blockade", "nervousness" and "lack of concentration". The "training" category included only "stress". It is of note that – analogically – in the "competition" category the "pain" item was extended by adding "stomachache", "headache" and "everything hurts".

The subjects were also asked how they usually dealt with their problems in sport. The answer categories (often multiple) are presented at the Fig. 4.

The following answers were qualified for the category „other activities": „I listen to music" „I count to 10" ($N=2$), "I climb the wall", "I try to kill time playing ball". "Self-control" category

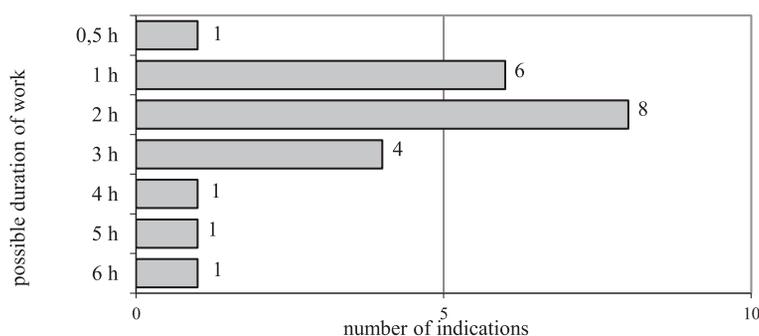


Fig. 1. Opinions of respondents ($N=22$) about the time devoted to a possible cooperation with a sport psychologist

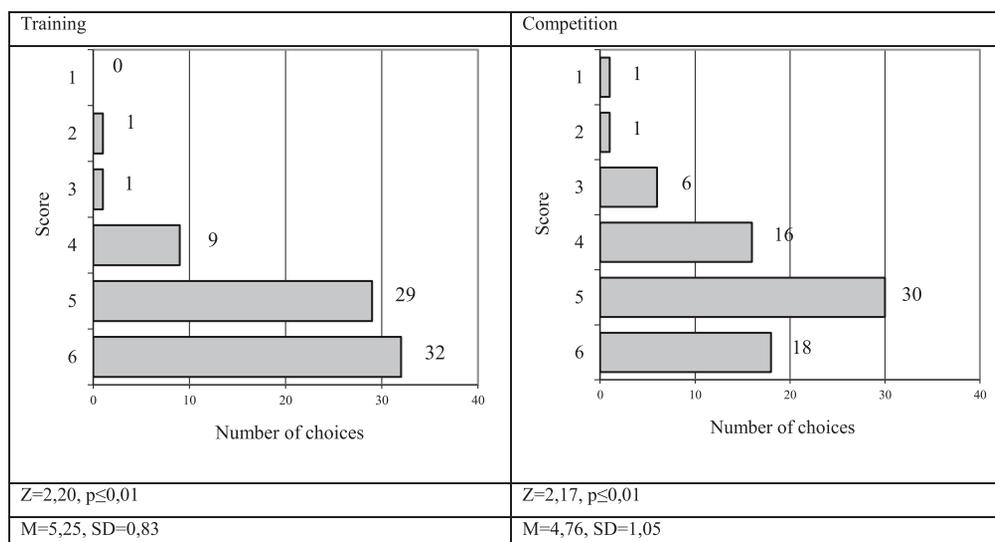


Fig. 2. Level of satisfaction in a selected area – declarations of respondents

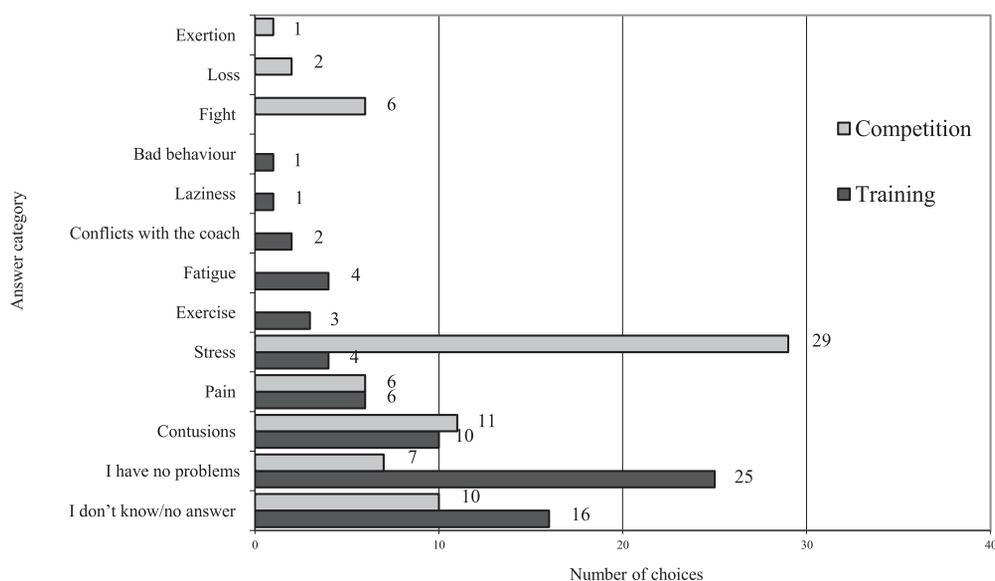


Fig. 3. Difficult situations in a selected area according to the respondents

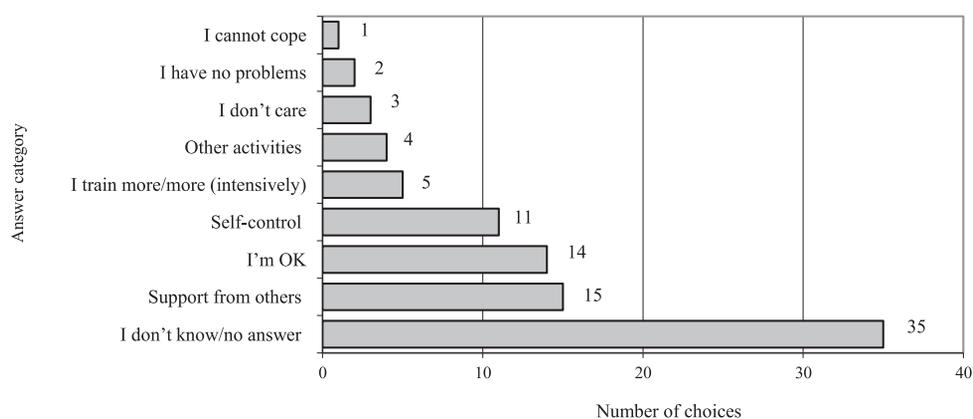


Fig. 4. Methods of coping with difficult situations according to the respondents

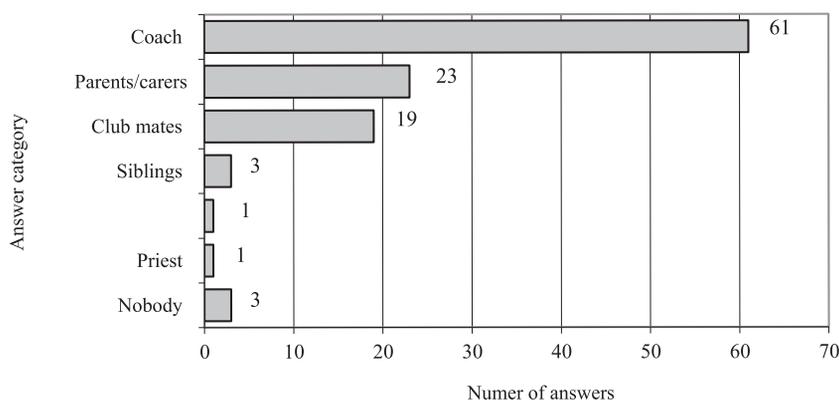


Fig. 5. Support from other people – respondents' choices

ry included such answers as: „I calm down”, „I concentrate”, „I try to cope with stress”, but also „I try to solve the problem step by step” or “I think about other things”. For the category “Support from others” such answers as “I talk to my parents”, “I see my coach”, “I ask my coach for advice and he/she helps me”, “I ask my friends from the club for advice” and “I ask my friends”.

Most of the respondents (35) answered the questions “I don't know” or left them unanswered. The questionnaire also included a multiple choice question who the subjects believe to be most helpful with their problems related to sport (Fig. 5).

Answering this question the subjects chose one of the answers or gave their own answers. Most often they reported it was their coach, parents/carers or peers involved in sports.

Discussion

The papers on the reported issue indicate that age, gender, training level, sport discipline and satisfaction with participation in sport are the variables differentiating attitudes, motivation and the competitors' engagement. The factors directly related to sport are also important [11,12,13]. It seems that studies of this kind on motivation specifics and need for mental training at the same time are worth continuing in the future. Their results may serve psychological training of children and youth and, first of all, will provide an answer to the question: when and how to start mental training.

The age group below 12 years old requires special attention. Young school age is the period of developing interest in sport-related activities. Moreover, we should be aware that age and mental development level may be significant for understanding certain notions [14,15].

Different ways of understanding stress coping are also reflected by this study results – in the answers pertaining to intuitive (accidental) ways of stress coping as well as a relatively big number of “I don't know” answers and, rarely no answers (suggesting possible difficulties understanding/description of abstract notions or a limited insight) seem to confirm this finding. Developing the one's consciousness of their emotions is considered one of the most important elements of youth competitors' mental training [16,17,18]. Differences in

age (a relatively wide range of the subjects' age – 11-18 years) may have affected this study results. However, the author's intention was the analysis of the demand for mental training considering the developmental specifics and showing the psychological perspective of child and youth sport.

In spite of these variables, it is worth noting that the problems/circumstances hard to identify by researchers (especially in case of occupations) include stress, pain (including psychosomatic symptoms, such as stomachache, headache and pains in all body) and contusions.

Now a question can be posed how children and youth are aware of the relationships between body and mind (and next question – how effective can be a cooperation between a sport physician, sport psychologist and a coach). However, this again indicates the need of pro-health education in sport and physical education involving the development of psychosocial skills, particularly these essential in stress coping [19,20,21]. The study results indicate that the kind of circumstances in sport and thus, subjective challenge (training vs. competition) differentiate the level of perceived satisfaction and stressogeneity.

As compared with training, competition is a less enjoyable event for the studied youth. While in team games, bad atmosphere is a factor co-determining the decision to give up sport, in individual sports, rivalry is such a factor [22]. Being aware that if they are involved in sports at a competitive level in future, there will be more such circumstances, requiring intervention.

The results of this study seem to confirm the finding that the knowledge of sport psychology among youth competitors is limited. At the same time, the survey results indicate that every tenth respondent consulted a sports psychologist. Almost 85% of the sample do not know what a sports psychologist deals with. Therefore informative-educative campaign for the development and specifics of this sport discipline. Such measures require close and directed cooperation between sports psychologists and coaches, parents/carers (the persons most often reported to be part of the support group) as well as physical education teachers and sports physicians. It is justifiable to educate these social/occupational groups (especially coaches on whom the athlete's and his/her occupational

career development depends) in human development psychology and sports psychology, especially to increase their awareness of the significance and opportunities to apply psychology in sports [14,16].

Presenting a high level of skills required from youth by adults is also important. Only then it will be possible to provide an adequate support for youth competitors during their development [23,24,25]. Everybody should understand that developing certain behavioural patterns – active and pro-health behaviours in a broad context – considering, inter alia, continuous development of psycho-social skills, may bring about measurable benefits, not only in sport, but also in other areas of human life [18,19,26]. The training atmosphere should also be modified [27] by creating a friendly environment where

simultaneous play and learning is possible, involving not only the sport-related skills, but also learning holistic approaches, taking into consideration the development of psychosocial competence, necessary in different spheres of youth activities, ensuring optimal adaptation to various changing social roles [4,21,28].

Conclusion

A limited scope of stress management techniques and strategies (especially in competitions) and thus, a more perceivable level of stressogeneity and lower level of satisfaction with participating in competitions are the signs indicating the necessity of undertaking measures by sport psychologists.

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Received: 02.10.2011

Accepted: 26.05.2012