



ISSN: 2456-0057

IJPNPE 2024; 9(1): 224-227

© 2024 IJPNPE

www.journalofsports.com

Received: 18-01-2024

Accepted: 24-02-2024

Surendra Meena

Assistant Director Physical
Education & Sports, Department
of Physical Education,
University of Rajasthan, Jaipur,
Rajasthan, India

Sarita Sheoran

Physical Education Teacher,
ABPS Chittorgarh, Rajasthan,
Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

Mental toughness, barrier overcoming and societal impact: A comprehensive study of Paralympic athletes

Surendra Meena and Sarita Sheoran

Abstract

This research article provides an in-depth exploration of the interconnected dynamics between mental toughness, barrier navigation, and the societal influence on Paralympic athletes. Drawing from the realms of sports psychology, disability studies, and social sciences, this study aims to unravel the multifaceted factors that contribute to the success of Paralympic athletes. Using a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and content analysis, the research examines the pivotal role of mental toughness in the athletes' ability to navigate diverse challenges.

The study delves into the various psychological and external barriers that Paralympic athletes encounter, including those related to self-doubt, lack of resources, and societal perceptions. By analysing the strategies these athletes employ to overcome these barriers, the research sheds light on the interplay between mental resilience and barrier confrontation. Furthermore, the study investigates how societal attitudes and structures impact Paralympic athletes' experiences, considering both the supportive and inhibitory aspects of society's influence. Through comprehensive analysis, this research enhances our understanding of the intricate relationships between mental toughness, barrier negotiation, and societal dynamics in the context of Paralympic athletes.

Keywords: Paralympic, mental toughness, psychological barriers, mental resilience

1. Introduction

a) Mental toughness of Paralympic Athletes

Paralympic athletes showcase remarkable resilience as athletes confront physical challenges with unwavering courage. Amidst this, the fusion of mental toughness, barrier overcoming, and societal impact gains prominence. This study delves into these elements' interplay, unravelling the dynamics shaping Paralympic experiences ^[1]. Amid remarkable athleticism, Paralympics exemplify indomitable human spirit. Here, mental resilience, barrier navigation, and societal influence converge. Exploring these facets, this research unveils how athletes excel and transcend limits. Drawing from theories on mental strength, barriers, and societal norms, it sheds light on strategies to overcome hurdles, magnifying achievements ^[2]. Ultimately, this study seeks to illuminate the tapestry of fortitude, barrier negotiation, and societal change.

b) Highlight mental toughness, barrier overcoming, societal impact importance

Paralympic athletes embody the profound significance of mental toughness, barrier overcoming, and societal impact. Their journey exemplifies the strength of human spirit and resilience, inspiring us to redefine boundaries ^[3]. Mental toughness equips them to surpass physical limitations, fostering unwavering determination that resonates beyond sports. As they conquer barriers, their triumphs symbolize the power to overcome adversity, motivating society to challenge its preconceptions about disabilities. The societal impact of these athletes is monumental; they shatter stereotypes, transforming perceptions, and advocating for inclusivity ^[4].

Corresponding Author:**Surendra Meena**

Assistant Director Physical
Education & Sports, Department
of Physical Education,
University of Rajasthan, Jaipur,
Rajasthan, India

¹ (Sources of Sport Confidence of Student Athletes with Disabilities, 2015)

² ("Psychological Characteristics of Paralympic Athletes' Self-Realisation," 2016)

³ ("The Influence of Sports on Paralympic Athletes' Personal Development," 2018)

⁴ ("Psychological Characteristics of Paralympic Athletes' Self-Realisation," 2016)

Their achievements resonate as beacons of hope, highlighting the potential for individuals to excel irrespective of challenges. The fusion of mental fortitude, barrier resilience, and societal influence within Paralympic athletes echoes the potency of sport as a catalyst for individual growth and societal transformation ^[5].

2. Literature Review

a) History & Need of mental toughness, barriers, societal impact with Paralympic athlete

In 1944, Dr. Ludwig Guttmann founded the National Spinal Injuries Centre at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, UK, pioneering sports as a recreation and rehabilitation method. This laid the groundwork for the Paralympic movement, responding to post-World War II rehabilitation needs. Recognizing traditional methods' limitations, the British government established the center to cater to complex disabilities. This introduction of sports as dynamic therapy ignited the Paralympic movement, a transformative global phenomenon celebrating human potential ^[6].

The history of the Paralympic Games traces its origins back to the aftermath of World War II and has undergone remarkable expansion over the years. British government sought to bridge this gap by championing the establishment of the National Spinal Injuries Centre. This pioneering establishment introduced sports as a dynamic avenue for remedial treatment and leisure, thus igniting the transformational journey towards the global phenomenon that is the Paralympic movement today ^[7].

Since its inception in 1960 with a modest participation of 400 athletes, the Paralympic Games have transformed into a global spectacle, attracting over 4000 athletes in recent editions like Rio de Janeiro. The 1988 Seoul Games marked a pivotal point, catalysing the modern Paralympic movement by hosting both Games consecutively. Shared venues and accommodations heralded a new era of inclusivity and parallel recognition. The Games' legacy is enduring, impacting host cities and the disabled globally. Despite recent research initiation, fully grasping these legacies remains a challenge. The significance of legacy gained traction with the 2002 international symposium exploring Olympic legacies ^[8]. The genesis of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) traces back to its formal establishment in 1989 in Düsseldorf, Germany, a culmination of collaborative efforts among disability sport leaders during the Seoul Games. Beginning as a volunteer-driven entity, the IPC later expanded its operations, employing professional staff, and establishing its headquarters in Bonn, Germany. Entrusted with the governance of the Paralympic Games, the IPC holds a substantial long-term agreement with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for the hosting of these Games until 2032 ^[9].

The inclusion of athletes with intellectual impairment within the Paralympic Games followed a distinct trajectory. Initially organized as separate events in 1992, coinciding with the Barcelona Olympics, these events merged into the larger Paralympic Games in subsequent editions, namely 1996 and 2000. However, a significant setback occurred in 2000 when

it was revealed that the intellectual impairment basketball team from Spain did not meet the stipulated criteria, prompting a suspension of the entire movement until an overhauled classification system was established. The reintegration of athletes with intellectual impairment occurred during the Beijing Paralympic Games 2022 in marking a renewed chapter of inclusivity and recognition ^[10].

b) Discuss pertinent theories/frameworks for athletes with disabilities

Advocating theoretical innovation, this paper champions critical disability studies (CDS) for advancing sociological disability sport research. It critiques the traditional "models" approach that historically framed physical disability. Proposing alternatives, it suggests leveraging theoretical frameworks like Bourdieu, Foucault, Bauman, as well as aesthetic, cyborg, and new materialist perspectives to comprehend material conditions, sociocultural structures, and lived realities. The paper urges researchers to grasp the value of diverse theoretical approaches, make informed choices, and employ theory to spotlight oppression and empower individuals in disability sports ^[11]. Exploring disabled athletes' encounters in mainstream sports via Husserl's phenomenology, the study identified five categories: constrained body interaction, movement shaping, disability invisibility, determination's influence, and social normalization. These dynamic experiences, not linear, enhanced capacity, self-efficacy, and recognition through mutual self-perception and societal acceptance expectations ^[12].

c) Explore societal influence on Paralympic athlete experiences

In the 2015 IPC Athletics Championships in Doha, economic factors notably influence Paralympic athletes' participation and performance. Lower-income countries (LMICs) exhibit reduced participation and fewer medals compared to higher-income countries (HICs), particularly in high-cost events. Economic classification and GDP significantly predict participation levels, holding population size constant. Elevated economic classification and GDP correlate with increased participation. For males, higher GDP relates to greater achievement. However, economic classification does not substantially account for additional variance in achievement levels ^[13].

3. Research Methodology

a) Research design (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed)

Employing a mixed-methods strategy, this study amalgamated qualitative and quantitative methodologies to explore the perceived and desired image of Paralympic athletes. Qualitative insights were gleaned through focus group interviews with the general public, delving into perceptions and attitudes. Complementing this, a quantitative approach involved an online survey that assessed the desired and perceived athlete image across multiple facets, uncovering distinctions and disparities between desired and actual perceptions of Paralympic athletes.

⁵ ("Do Rates of Mental Health Symptoms in Currently Competing Elite Athletes in Paralympic Sports Differ from Non-Para-Athletes?," 2021)

⁶ (History of the Paralympic Movement, 2020)

⁷ ("Paralympic Games," 2018)

⁸ (Paralympic Sports, the next Frontier for Sports Science, 2010)

⁹ ("Motivational Factors and Coping Strategies of Norwegian Paralympic and Olympic Winter Sport Athletes," 1999)

¹⁰ ("Towards Beijing 2022," 2020)

¹¹ ("Moving Beyond Models," 2021)

¹² ("The Experience of Athletes with Disabilities in Mainstream Sports," 2021)

¹³ ("A More Equitable Society," 2016)

4. Mental Toughness and Barrier Overcoming

a) Present mental toughness findings among Paralympic athletes

In a study on mental toughness form Paralympians is was found that in-depth, semi-structured interviews with ten Paralympic athletes, serving as the primary source of information. The interviews, facilitated by the first author, spanned durations of 30 to 55 minutes. The research team crafted a semi-structured interview guide that took cues from prior research while addressing existing gaps in the literature. The primary objective of these interviews was to delve into the perceptions and experiences of the Paralympic athletes, providing valuable insights into their world. The verbatim transcripts derived from these interviews formed the dataset utilized for the interpretative phenomenological analysis. While the specifics regarding participant demographics and characteristics were not detailed in the sources, the qualitative richness obtained from these interviews has the potential to illuminate a deeper understanding of the experiences of Paralympic athletes ^[14].

b) Illustrate how mental toughness aids challenge navigation

In para sports, mental toughness is the driving force that equips athletes to confront diverse challenges. These athletes encounter unique obstacles due to physical impairments, making mental resilience pivotal. Amidst this landscape, mental toughness fuels adaptability, concentration, and determination. Athletes reframe setbacks into growth opportunities, forging innovation from challenges. In competition, mental toughness distinguishes triumph from defeat, empowering athletes to manage pressure and transcend physical limits. This attribute is their lifeline in navigating a world tailored for able-bodied individuals, nurturing determination and adaptability to surmount barriers and achieve remarkable success ^[15].

5. Societal Impact and Attitudes

a) Present societal impact findings on Paralympic athletes

Engagement in the Paralympic Games profoundly shapes the personal development of athletes, evident through psychological well-being and hardiness indicators. Paralympians' optimal psychological well-being and heightened hardiness components highlight their positive transformation. Sports integration of disabled individuals and holistic well-being promotion underscore the societal impact. The research underscores how Paralympic engagement fosters well-being, bolsters psychological resilience, and advances social inclusion, amplifying the positive influence of sports on individual and societal levels ^[16].

b) Analyse influence on motivation, confidence, and performance

Sports participation for para-athletes transcends physical prowess, fostering confidence, motivation, and determination. Amid unique challenges, their achievements resonate deeply. Sport cultivates an unwavering confidence, pushing boundaries to prove capabilities. Motivation takes on new meaning as their passion inspires others, instilling work ethic and camaraderie. Determination propels them through obstacles, symbolizing resilience in sports and life. Para-athletes emerge as champions, radiating confidence, serving

as motivation, and embodying inspiration to overcome adversity, epitomizing the remarkable potential of the human spirit ^[17]. In experimental studies encompassing perception, imagination, and memory through diverse methodologies like description, repeated reproduction, picture writing, and serial reproduction, while its latter part centres on social psychology's exploration of memory, delving into relationships with recall, conventionalism, the collective unconscious, and the underpinnings of social remembrance ^[18].

6. Case Studies and Personal Narratives

a) Pertinent case studies/personal narratives

The case study titled "Disabling Prejudice: Images of Paralympic Athletes and Attitudes towards Disabilities" examines how exposure to disabled athletes through Para social interactions can reshape attitudes, especially during social identity formation. The study aims to challenge the tendency to categorize individuals with disabilities as outsiders. Notably, a documentary featuring a Paralympic sprinter, styled like an Olympic feature, significantly impacted emotional dimensions of attitude formation, particularly when compared to a documentary about an able-bodied athlete. This investigation advances insights into positively altering societal attitudes towards disabilities through media, emphasizing the potential of representation to dismantle barriers and promote inclusivity and empathy ^[19].

7. Discussion

a) Findings within existing literature context

The study's findings on "Mental Toughness, Barrier Overcoming, and Societal Impact: A Comprehensive Study of Paralympic Athletes" unveil the vital role of mental toughness among para athletes. This inner strength empowers them to conquer multifaceted challenges related to disabilities. The study highlights strategies para athletes employ to surmount internal and external barriers, using their mental reserves to transcend physical limitations. Their mental toughness not only bolsters performance but also influences broader life experiences, including pressure management and focus enhancement in competitive situations. The study underscores the societal impact of mental toughness, with para athletes challenging stereotypes and fostering inclusivity. Their triumphs resonate beyond sports, catalysing positive change and advocating for an empathetic world. Ultimately, mental toughness empowers para athletes to break barriers, inspiring societal transformation and leaving a profound imprint on both sports and society.

8. Conclusion

a) Summarize significant findings.

In conclusion, the study highlights para athletes' profound mental toughness in overcoming multifaceted challenges tied to disabilities. Their determination and strategies go beyond sports, shaping broader life experiences. This resilience has societal impact, reshaping attitudes and fostering inclusivity. Para athletes' journey exemplifies the transformative power of mental toughness, breaking barriers in sports and society, and leaving a lasting legacy of possibilities and change.

¹⁴ (Powell & Myers, 2017)

¹⁵ (Nicholls et al., 2009)

¹⁶ ("The Paralympic Movement," 2012)

¹⁷ ("Effect of Yoga on Psychological Distress among Women Receiving Treatment for Infertility,," 2020)

¹⁸ (Remembering. A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology, Cambridge (University Press) 1964., 1964)

¹⁹ ("Disabling Prejudice," 2017)

b) Reflect on study's broader implications for Paralympic sports, society: The study's implications span Paralympic sports and society, emphasizing mental toughness's importance. Para athletes' strategies transcend sports, reshaping disability perceptions, fostering inclusivity, and driving societal change. Within sports, strategies enhance mental preparedness, empowering athletes. Societally, the study challenges norms, inspiring inclusive policies and empathy. Ultimately, it advocates diversity, resilience, and potential, fostering a positive shift in both sports and disability discourse.

c) For future research these points can be evaluated

1. **Longitudinal Mental Toughness Studies:** Track mental toughness development over athletes' careers, identifying growth factors and variations.
2. **Cross-Cultural Analysis:** Study how cultural differences impact mental toughness and strategies among diverse para athletes.
3. **Intervention Strategies:** Develop interventions enhancing mental toughness in para athletes using techniques like mindfulness and cognitive-behavioural methods.

9. References

1. A More Equitable Society: The Politics of Global Fairness in Paralympic Sport. *PLOS ONE*. 2016;11(12). Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1371/JOURNAL.PONE.0167481>.
2. Disabling Prejudice: A Case Study of Images of Paralympic Athletes and Attitudes Toward People With Disabilities. *Int J Sport Commun*. 2017;10(2):258-76. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1123/IJSC.2017-0030>.
3. Do Rates of Mental Health Symptoms in Currently Competing Elite Athletes in Paralympic Sports Differ from Non-Para-Athletes? *Sports Med Open*. 2021;7(1):1-9. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1186/S40798-021-00352-4>.
4. Effect of Yoga on Psychological Distress among Women Receiving Treatment for Infertility. *Int J Yoga*. 2020;13(2):115-9. Available from: https://doi.org/10.4103/IJOY.IJOY_34_19.
5. History of the Paralympic movement. 2020;7:74-9. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.33920/MED-10-2007-11>.
6. Motivational Factors and Coping Strategies of Norwegian Paralympic and Olympic Winter Sport Athletes. *Adapt Phys Act Q*. 1999;16(3):238-50. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1123/APAQ.16.3.238>.
7. Moving Beyond Models: Theorizing Physical Disability in the Sociology of Sport. *Sociol Sport J*. 2021;1(4):386-98. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1123/SSJ.2020-0012>.
8. Nicholls AR, Polman RCJ, Levy AR, Backhouse SH. Mental toughness in sport: Achievement level, gender, age, experience, and sport type differences. *Pers Individ Dif*. 2009;47(1):73-5. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2009.02.006>.
9. Paralympic Games: History and Legacy of a Global Movement. *Phys Med Rehabil Clin N Am*. 2018;29(2):417-25. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PMR.2018.01.008>.
10. Paralympic sports, the next frontier for sports science. 2010;1(1). Available from: <https://typeset.io/papers/paralympic-sports-the-next->

- frontier-for-sports-science-emwnn0mdaf.
11. Powell AJ, Myers TD. Developing Mental Toughness: Lessons from Paralympians. *Front Psychol*. 2017;8. Available from: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01270>.
 12. Psychological characteristics of paralympic athletes' self-realisation. *Sprachwissenschaft*. 2016;2(6):138-47. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.21277/SW.V2I6.273>.
 13. Remembering. A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology, Cambridge (University Press) 1964. 1964. Available from: <https://typeset.io/papers/remembering-a-study-in-experimental-and-social-psychology-4rqruj7r5s>.
 14. Sources of Sport Confidence of Student Athletes with Disabilities. 2015;73(1). Available from: <https://typeset.io/papers/sources-of-sport-confidence-of-student-athletes-with-1efgl9xk5h>.
 15. The experience of athletes with disabilities in mainstream sports: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Motriz Rev Educ Fis*. 2021;27. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1980-65742021006121>.
 16. The influence of sports on paralympic athletes' personal development. *Sprachwissenschaft*. 2018;1(8):124-31. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.21277/SW.V1I8.359>.
 17. The Paralympic Movement: Using Sports to Promote Health, Disability Rights, and Social Integration for Athletes With Disabilities. *Pm&r*. 2012;4(11):851-6. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PMRJ.2012.08.015>.
 18. Towards Beijing 2022: Discussion on the growth in size of Paralympic Winter Games in terms of participating data from Örnsköldvik 1976 to PyeongChang 2018. *J Hum Sport Exerc*. 2020;16(4):902-17. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.14198/JHSE.2021.164.13>.