

Position statements - 1. Definition of sport psychology, 1995

FEPSAC Position Statement # 1

Definition of sport psychology

Several studies have revealed the importance and acceptance of sport psychology. However, the crucial question about the real nature of sport psychology is difficult to answer precisely. Although many definitions have been suggested, there is no comprehensive and internationally accepted definition of sport psychology until now. There is, therefore, a need for a clear description and definition for this area of growing importance.

In this Position Statement FEPSAC makes a proposal which takes into account (a) the historical roots of European sport psychology, (b) the complexity of the subject and (c) the potential user of sport psychology.

Although some cultures and languages use distinct terms for different types of physical activity, in this statement the term sport is used as an umbrella term including all kinds of exercise, sport and physically active pursuits.

What is sport psychology?

Sport psychology is concerned with the psychological foundations, processes and consequences of the psychological regulation of sport-related activities of one or several persons acting as the subject(s) of the activity. The focus may be on behaviour or on different psychological dimensions of human behaviour, i.e. affective, cognitive, motivational or sensori-motor dimensions.

The physical activity can take place in competitive, educational, recreational, preventative and rehabilitation settings and includes health-related exercise. Subjects are all persons involved in the different sport and exercise settings, e.g. athletes, coaches, officials, teachers, physiotherapists, parents, spectators etc.

How is sport psychology constituted?

Sport psychology as a scientific discipline, as well as a professional field, is loosely associated with, and draws upon, the three areas of (1) sport practice, (2) psychology and (3) other sport sciences. These areas are considered equally valid. All of them have a bearing on the topics, the theoretical foundations, the methodological approaches, and the scientific and ethical standards of sport psychology.

The interrelations between these areas are briefly described as follows:

- Sport psychology - Sport practice: Sport psychology is faced with issues that arise from exercise and sport practice. It tries to better understand these demands and attempts to give assistance in satisfying them.
- Sport psychology - Psychology: Sport psychology is an applied subdiscipline of psychology. It partly draws upon knowledge adopted from different branches of psychology and contributes to the further understanding of psychology in general.
- Sport psychology - Other sport sciences: Sport psychology is one discipline of the sport sciences. The more sport psychology generates specific knowledge by empirical work in the field of sport and physical activity, the more the findings and methods of other sport sciences have to be accounted for. Some questions may only be answered using interdisciplinary approaches.

What may sport psychology contribute to sport?

Sport psychology as a scientific discipline and professional area furthers the understanding of sport. It analyzes, assesses and directs activity in all aspects of sport by means of psychological processes. Thus sport psychology has a responsibility for well-being, the attainment and maintenance of health, and the improvement of performance. Sport psychology may support the individual or the group with the aim that the actions of the subject master the requirements of the task, fit with situational demands and constraints, and are appropriate to the subject's abilities and needs.

Sport psychology gives the body of knowledge that contributes both to the personal growth and development of the subject and to the formation of the conditions under which exercise and sport are performed.

What do people in sport psychology do?

We use the term 'sport psychologist' in a broad sense including all qualified persons working in the field, independent of their academic education. Different countries may have restrictions on the use of the term 'psychologist'.

Sport psychologists have three interrelated tasks:

- **Research:** Research is needed to understand the psychological regulation of activity in the setting of sport. The following types of research are conducted: Theoretical or empirical, basic and applied, laboratory and field studies. All contribute to the construction of a specific body of knowledge.
- **Education:** Sport psychology is an important subject in the education of almost every person involved in sport. Three different groups of people may be given knowledge and competence in sport psychology: a). on an academic level, students in psychology, the sport sciences and physical education; b). on a professional level, psychologists moving into the field of sports, coaches, training supervisors, officials and administrators; and finally c). sport participants, e.g. top level athletes, health-related exercise participants, participants in adventure sports, or rehabilitation patients.
- **Application:** Knowledge and competence in sport psychology may be applied to two main functions, namely (1) diagnosis and assessment (e.g. talent detection, testing of cognitive or sensori-motor skills, or evaluation of the needs of participants), and (2) intervention (e.g. guidance in cooperation with – other responsible persons in the field, counselling, or consulting in special problem situations).