

Course Name: Sports Psychology

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PSYCHOLOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR INJURY

Welcome to session 2 of Psychology of Injury. In this particular session, we will be talking about the strategies that can be used by everybody especially when it comes to the psychology of injury. We are going to be talking about what strategies psychologists actually use in general in order to help athletes to recover from the injury. So, the objective of the session is of course, to look at what are the psychological strategies which could be used for injury. So, as I am going to talk about these strategies regarding the injury, I want to talk about a story. This is a story of my own personal experience.

I remember in 2017, I had a knee injury and that particular injury was extremely painful because I took almost a year to recover from that injury, as much as I remember. And, there were certain things which really helped me during the rehabilitation process. One I really had to trust the medical team. It was a very uncertain period. I did not know if I will be able to do things which I would normally do, regularly, like for example, when will I be able to walk regularly, when will I be able to play sport regularly. I think during those periods relying on my own support system, be it my friends, my family was extremely useful and crucial for me. And apart from this, I think I also wanted to, , you know, ask doctors regularly in terms of , you know, when will I be able to be fine, how long will it take for my own recovery. So, basically asking questions also helped me gain understanding and confidence, rather than just relying on information which is available on the internet. And, the other thing which really helped me was also that I had to slow down.

I realized that , you know, the more I was hurrying the rehabilitation process somewhere, my body was not able to pace up at the same , you know, intensity or same quickness. So, I had to really realize and understand and be kind to my body and remember that, “you know what? my body is going to take its own time to heal.” So, I had to learn to respect my body and slow down and follow the process and protocols. So, giving you this particular context before we move forward in order to understand what kind of strategies can help and enable athletes to recover from their own injuries. So, let us look at this particular image.

In this particular image, there are certain things which are actually coming to my mind as I am seeing this athlete. This particular athlete is feeling relaxed, he is confident and he also knows the aim and the goal and where he has to focus on. And based on that , you know, he will be able to take his shot. What if I told you that the same strategies that we have spoken about this particular athlete in terms of the fact that , you know, he is feeling relaxed, he is feeling calm, he has his confidence level. The same thing can also help you during your injury rehabilitation process.

The focus like this athlete, he knows where the focus needs to be. In the same way for those who have been injured, if you can remember to focus on the recovery, I think that is extremely enabling and it is also empowering to move forward from the injury rehabilitation phase.

Moving forward , you know, this is also another image where , you know, we could look at the fact that , you know, these two athletes are actually celebrating their partnership, there is communication which is actually happening and , you know, they also know in terms of what target they actually have to achieve, what do they actually have to reach and that is what they are actually doing. How about you realize that during the injury rehabilitation process you need to have an aim, you need to have a target and the same time you need to be flexible with the target, you need to communicate just like these athletes are doing with each other. It is important to communicate with the medical team, it is important to communicate your fears and inhibitions and every single thing that you have concerns regarding your body.

Because what I feel is a mental strategies which can be used with respect to performance can also be used with respect to injury rehabilitation. So, we have spoken about , you know, a lot of

skills from just these two images, and athletes are mentally tough because you have seen a lot of uncertainties in your life, when it comes to your career, when it comes to sports. So, I think remembering your strengths and then moving forward towards the injury is an extremely helpful and useful process. Now let us look at , you know, the psychological strategies to injury rehabilitation. Of course, there are multiple ways to work on your injury. One is you can focus on your body, the thoughts and emotions or your behavior. I am going to give you strategies which can help you at all levels, be it at the body level, be it at the thought level or at the behavioral level.

Let us look at the body level, you know, this particular quote by the Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, has been so beautiful because he says that , you know, “go back and take care of yourself. Your body needs you, your perceptions need you, your suffering needs you, the sufferings need you to acknowledge it, go home and be there for all these things.”

I think this quote somewhere also says that , you know, during the injury there is of course, an emotional pain, there is a physical pain which is there, and one has to be extremely compassionate and also very kind , you know, when you are going through the process of the injury rehabilitation and that is something that I will urge you all to take care of, because being kind to the body. So, what we have to understand is that our human body has knowledge, wisdom and healing capacity. If you are able to go out there and perform at such a high level, right? and the body is capable of doing this for you, just imagine the power that the body has in order to heal itself, especially, when there is an injury, right? The body has amazing healing capabilities. I think that is something that we have to remember and somewhere the body will be able to heal itself when we nourish it. Just like , you know, there is a plant and you water it, you give it sunlight, it is going to grow beautifully right. In the same way during the injury when we take care of our body then the healing process is going to happen very beautifully.

So moving forward , you know, there is this one particular quote by an athlete which has been so powerful. He said that, “I knew only how to practice and win. When I was injured I didn't know to rest. I tried very hard to get back to the sport early and sustained more injuries.” So this is another issue which we see that , you know, one of the issues with respect to , you know, readjustment to the life after an injury can be that , you know, getting back to the sport early and

sustaining more injuries. I think athletes need to have a balance between , you know, training and rehabilitation and then resting and recovery. Some of them want to get back to the sport very quickly and do not really focus on rest and recovery. Some of them may focus too much on rest and recovery and not really doing anything in the rehabilitation process.

So, it has to be a mix, there has to be a balance. So, some of the skills which can really help you are breathing, relaxation skills, taking medical help whenever there is pain, talking to your doctor, and trusting the process, trusting the people you work with is extremely important especially in the injury rehabilitation process. Like I already previously mentioned in the past unit, past section, that we discussed about, injury rehabilitation process is a teamwork. So trusting the process of who you work with is also an essential skill.

So now, let us just look at another important strategy which can help athletes , you know, come back to the safety of their own body. So there is this theory called as Polyvagal theory which has been given by Stephen Porges and his theory is so beautiful, you could definitely go back and read more on this particular theory. So using that particular theory I am talking about the need and importance of safety and connection for the body and also with others with the environment that you are in, and that can play an important role in the healing process. So in this particular image we can just see that there is warmth, there is love, there is affection and there is care. So I think when you actually give yourself that safety , you know, you will be able to recover and heal faster. So basically, when you feel safe, according to the Polyvagal theory, the nervous system actually promotes the homeostatic functions of health, of healing, growth and , you know, restoration.

So, basically feeling safety is a necessary feeling for all human beings, and under difficulties, I think, when we feel safe, we will be able to move forward and one of the things which we also need is , you know, we need the support system for us to feel safe. So, when you are not feeling safe within yourself, maybe you are having repeated thoughts or recurrent patterns, the same thoughts keep coming up again and again. So getting support from others could be helpful. So, co-regulating or self-regulation, supporting self, social support all these are the most important ways to navigate through this situation.

So, now let us just look at a quiz before we move forward. Social support help athlete to feel safe, we have conflicts, be lonely. The correct answer is feeling safe, if you have got it well done.

Now moving forward , you know, positive self-talk and problem solving approaches are also found to be extremely useful in the injury rehabilitation process. We have enough theories, we have enough research evidence in order to talk about the fact that positive self-talk is very useful. In fact, a research study by Levilla and Orlock in 1991, this was cited by Hamilton in his research work.

He said that , you know, what self-talk was found to be one of the top 3 most used psychological interventions and Levilla and Orlock study also found that , you know, those who use positive self-talk recovered faster from the spot injury and also developed a positive attitude towards their whole injury process. And basically, what is also essential for athletes to remember is the problem solving skills. Sometimes athletes think that , you know, injury is a big problem, it is a problem, but we need to also learn how to solve a particular problem rather than thinking that, “I will never be able to move past this particular phase.” Those who actually problem solve, also can be resilient and they also have amazing capabilities to move through anything which comes their way.

And apart from this , you know, sometimes there may be athletes with career ending injuries. So for them, looking at alternative career option is also a problem solving technique which can help them navigate with the injury recovery process better. So now, let us just look at an example in terms of how can you develop positive self-talk, since it has got a lot of evidence that it will help with the injury recovery process. Let us listen to this particular athlete's audio.

“Whenever we talk about injury or say about my own injury, the thoughts that come in my mind is something like will I be able to get back or will I be able to do my best even after recovery or what if the injury comes back, once we are on track or on the court after rehabilitation or anything. So it is always negative thoughts that is in my mind, when I think of injury. I still remember after my first injury, the only thought that came in my mind is, ‘will I be

able to recover fast and get on track as soon as possible? or is this the end of my athletic career?"

I think what we also need to understand is, athletes can have a lot of negative thoughts or negative self-talk, thinking that , "you know what? it is so difficult for me", "others do not want me", "I will never return to the sport", "I am not wanted by my coach, by my teammates because I am injured", "I have not done anything bad to anybody." These kinds of thoughts and , you know, self-talk can make the healing process quite difficult and the kind of emotions you might end up feeling is sadness, helpless, anger and hopelessness.

Definitely, if you look at other theoretical approaches in psychology, they also say that , you know, it is important to accept, embrace and move forward with these emotions , you know, but at the same time, what we also need to understand is during uncertain situations right? Sometimes, there is a grief of losing and missing out on the sport and this kind of emotions like sadness, can give us a sense of control and that could be one of the reasons as to why , you know, athletes may be relying on this quite a bit.

However, if you use positive self-talk , you know, like for example, "I know I am doing the best right now", "I know I am in the right path", "I have enough emotional support from the medical team." These kinds of thoughts and this kind of positive self-talk, when you actually develop in yourself, you could actually be hopeful, there can be calmness, positivity and happiness. And, this can also give you a sense of control in order to handle any particular situation. So, definitely positive self-talk helps you to develop confidence and reduce your anxiety level as much as possible.

So now, I think in , you know, imagery section you have already learnt about what is an imagery and you also learnt about what is goal setting. So, I would say that these two are the most important skills that sports psychologists use even for the injury rehabilitation process.

So, we use imagery for pain management, imagery for healing and imagery for return to sport okay. So images and , you know, when imagery is combined with the relaxation skill, it can help athlete to imagine their own injuries and , you know, they can focus on the healing process.

Like for example, what I personally do as a practitioner is also that , you know, I ask the athletes to look at their injured area , you know, and I sometimes use a lot of loving kindness meditation and ask them to think about the injured area give it a lot of love, affection and be kind to that particular part and embrace it as a part of themselves. That helps them in the healing process quite a bit. Sometimes, what we also do with athletes as sports psychologists is, like, we ask them to imagine their particular injury in terms of how it looks, what is the color of that particular injury , you know, ask them to imagine how the color is actually shifting and probably ask them to imagine that there is good amount of blood flow which is actually happening in that particular area. So, you could definitely look at a lot of resources which are available regarding , you know, what kind of imagery can be used, especially for the healing process.

And sometimes, we also use imagery for return to sport because like I said, that once the body is injured , you know, there is pain in the body, the body actually remembers that pain.

So there can be sense of fear for the athletes to return back to the sport, because they may feel hesitant to go back and do the same movements which of course the injury. So prior to that , you know, it is good that athletes can actually remember and , you know, practice the same set of skills, imagine them and then go out there and physically perform them. And a number of research studies have actually provided support for this, and I also remember watching a documentary on application of this particular skill, by a coach, to help one of the most elite athletes get back to the sport. So this is something that we also use when it comes to healing images.

And apart from this, I think goal setting is also an important skill that athletes can learn. Self motivation is an important skill that one can practice because , you know, what happens is that once a person is injured the will and the motivation to go back and recover might be less because , you know, it takes effort, it takes a lot of commitment. And, research has found that those who are dedicated and there is a sense of self motivation, and also set goals they are likely to recover from the injury faster. And rewarding your wins and celebrating your small success; like I remember this one particular athlete, who was saying something like , “you know what? The past month, I was only on my bed with my knee. Right now, I am able to walk” , you know, that was a big celebration for her and then, “I am able to climb stairs, that is a huge thing, I am

able to start training.” So basically, she started looking at the monthly progress she was doing and she was able to set goals for herself and also that motivated her and made her hopeful.

Now, let us listen to Nivedita Rajan, who is a sports psychologist on , you know, her thoughts on why injury rehabilitation requires goal setting as a skill.

“Hello everyone I am Nivedita Rajan and I am a consultant sports psychologist. In my journey as a sports psychologist, I have always often come across many sports persons who are dealing with injuries. So injury is of course, a part and parcel of one's sporting career, and goal setting as a psychological skill is beneficial in many ways. It is not only useful to improve one's performance and also chart their progress, but it can also be used by athletes when they are facing an injury and they are also undergoing rehab and post recovery.

Many athletes sometimes try to rush into the training, post the rehab. So this is how goal setting can be made useful to those athletes recovering. So, goal setting can be used to make one's return to active playing in a more effective manner. So, this can be done by setting goals for the rehab sessions and seeing quantum improvement from week to week. So thereby boosting one's confidence and also their motivation and also once they have , you know, recovered from their injury, goal setting can also be used by these athletes, for their return into the active playing, because sometimes , you know, it's a common phenomenon that athletes and sports persons rush into playing and try to achieve their optimum level post, you know, injury.

So using the goal setting chart they could easily , you know, chalk out their progress, so that over a period of time they are able to achieve their optimum level of play thereby , you know, reducing any kind of further stress to the injury that is already been created. Thank you.”

So moving forward, this quiz question, let's see if you can get it. During the injury rehabilitation, imagery can be used for pain management, healing injury, return to sport or all of the above and the correct answer is- all of the above. So, if you have got it, good job.

Now , you know, what we also need to understand is, when athletes are injured there is always this thought that , “you know what? Why did this happen to me ? “ , you know, “this is not a

good thing to happen and why am I even going through this particular phase?" Sometimes, I think, what is the lesson that could be learnt from this particular injury is a great strategy for athletes to think about because it makes them more hopeful and also helps them remain more compassionate towards them, especially during one of the tough phases. So, I remember this one of the athletes, you know, who was injured and for him sport was everything. So, he had to really learn to, you know, call his friends that he never kept in touch with. He had to learn hobbies, like he started making tea, then he started even gardening as a new skill and he started music as a form of therapy. And, he would also watch his videos so that, you know, it would keep motivating him to come back to the sport and he started learning about the science of sports and understand his body much better.

And, it was also beautiful that he learned from a number of injured athletes, in terms of what could be done in this particular process and that helped this athlete to, you know, move forward, especially, in his injury rehabilitation program.

Let us just look at the recap right now. So basically, in this particular section, we have spoken about what are the strategies for taking charge of your thoughts, behavior and taking care of your body. In the next few minutes, we will be discussing about what can be the other psychological strategies that could be used by athletes, especially when it comes to injury. Thank you.