

**5<sup>th</sup> icCSBs 2017**  
**The Annual International Conference on Cognitive-Social,  
and Behavioural Sciences**

**IMPACT OF A SPORTIVE PAST ON WELL-BEING, RESILIENCE  
AND SUCCESS IN CURRENT PROFESSIONALS – THE REVIEW**

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*Abstract*

It has been proved that sport and physical activity have great potential to enhance the quality of life, improving resilience abilities and promoting success. However, the relationship of sport with well-being, resilience and success, using an integrative perspective of those three concepts, has yet to be studied. The development of this research starts from the generalized intuition that sports practice has significant benefits: promoting health, preventing injuries and contributing to an increase of well-being. In this article, we discuss the impact of sport and physical activity on well-being, resilience and success, via a review of the studies in the three separate areas and a synthesis of what is known in these different areas regarding the sporting context. The literature provides consistent support for a positive relationship between sport and well-being, sport and resilience and sport and success. We found articles with these assumptions; however, we did not find any literature or empirical study with an integrative perspective. Most of the studies have examined athletes or physical activity participants. This does not offer any evidence as regard the relationship between sports practice or physical activity in an individual's past and the effects of participation in sport competition or physical activity, and the combined evidence of individuals' higher well-being, higher resilience and higher success in their present life. Finally, we developed a model and designed empirical methods to achieve that goal.

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**Keywords:** Sport, well-being, resilience, success.



## **1. Introduction**

The development of this research starts from a generalized intuition that the practice of sport has substantial benefits, including the promotion of health, avoidance of injury and contribution to an increase in well-being. As we do not yet know of a well-defined theoretical body, nor enough empirical studies to prove this intuition, it was necessary to engage in a careful literature review on the subject to define a theoretical body and to design the necessary empirical study that proves (or not) that regular sports practice with certain characteristics carried out at a certain time in life may have a positive causal relationship with the perception of success at a later age in life.

## **2. Problem Statement**

After a thorough literature review of peer-reviewed journals, we could not find a robust theoretical body of work or any empirical studies that enable us to assert that past sports practices play a positive and determinant role in current well-being, resilience and success in any job or profession. As this is our intuition, we wanted to develop a robust theoretical model we could then test through a global survey applied to several people in their adulthood phase. By highlighting these issues, we will uncover an important gap on the path to more holistic social public policies.

## **3. Research Questions**

It has been proved that sport and physical activity have great potential to enhance the quality of life, improving resilience abilities and promoting the means to success; however, we need to understand further connections in greater detail. In this ongoing research project, we aim to carry out a thorough and systematic literature review regarding these main questions:

What is the relationship between sports practice and life competencies?

What is the mechanism of connection between sports practice and well-being perception?

How does sports practice create and develop resilience for life?

How much of the success in a person's life can be due to positive emotions as a result of sports practice?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is to understand deeply if past sport/physical activity has a significant impact on today's levels of resilience, well-being and success in life. In so doing, we aim to contribute by offering recommendations for integrative social public policies.

### **Sports Skills**

The concept of competence associated with the school environment has been studied by sociologist Phillipe Perrenoud. The author considers that competence is the 'ability to act effectively in a certain type of situation, supported by, but not limited to, knowledge. In order to face a situation in the best possible way, it is usually necessary to put into action and in synergy several complementary cognitive resources

(...)' (Perrenoud, 1999, p.7). Human beings do not all experience the same experiences and therefore develop skills adapted to their reality (Perrenoud, 1999). One can conclude that skills allow a professional to select or to combine components to maintain his or her performance standards. Sport has been mentioned as an influential resource in the development of young people in extremely important domains, such as self-awareness, human relations and the development of critical life skills (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2004). In this way, sport is recognized as an indispensable subject in the formation of children and young people (MacNamara & Collins, 2013), due to both the representativeness of universally structured ethical codes, rules and conduct, and also the greater physical and psychological condition that physical activity leads to (Goudas et al., 2006; Gould et al., 2007; Holt & Dunn, 2004; MacNamara & Collins, 2012; Weinberg & McDermott, 2002).

Goudas et al. (2006) argue that life skills are learned through demonstration and practice. Skills such as the ability to work under pressure, problem solving, goal setting, communicating, dealing with success and failure, working as a team and feedback management can be learned through sport and transferred to other areas in life—life skills.

Spray and Wang (2001) demonstrated that the group that received lower scores on competence perception and feelings of self-determination regarding classroom behaviour also received lower scores in Physical Education than those who scored the most in the same variables.

Gould et al. (2007), in a study examining how football coaches develop life skills in their players (involving 10 coaches with, on average, 31 years of experience and a 76.6% win ratio) report that coaches do not separate training in life skills from the general strategies of training, instead making the personal development of their players a priority.

Strength or mental endurance, which will be developed later, is one of the most important psychological characteristics to achieve excellent performance (Connaughton et al., 2008; Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffett, 2002; Jones, 2002). These authors consider that physical endurance and talent are not enough to overcome the challenges; mental resistance is also required.

In a study by Gould et al. (2002), athletes were characterized by their ability to deal with and control anxiety, as well as their confidence, mental endurance/resilience, sports intelligence, ability to concentrate and block distractions, competitiveness, work ethic, goal definition and achievement, coachability, high levels of hope, optimism and perfectionism. It was also revealed that there are other additional factors that influence the development of an athlete, including community, family, the athlete him/herself, the coach, those within the sports environment, those outside the sports environment and the sports process itself.

Furthermore, MacNamara and Collins (2013) state that the most successful athletes consistently employ mental abilities that optimize learning and concentration, allowing them successfully to overcome the various challenges.

The psychological characteristics involved in the development of excellence seem to be acquired in a continuous development (Spray & Wang, 2001). The consensus is that to achieve success, individuals need personality, commitment, determination and perseverance when facing difficulties and distractions (Holt & Dunn, 2004).

Roth and Basow (2004) argue that women who practise physical activity have a greater ability to overcome gender empowered structures. They acquire confidence, competence and pleasure when they participate in physically demanding activities. Woodcok, Cronin and Forde (2012) conducted a study to verify empirically whether development projects through sport with some duration would bring benefits. They conducted 333 questionnaires with girls between the ages of 10 and 15 years from different religious cultures. They concluded that when increasing the duration of the development program, greater benefits were evident in areas such as life skills, social integration and HIV/AIDS awareness. They also found that leadership competence had significantly improved.

Within the context of adapted sport, Blauwet and Willick (2012) studied the Paralympic Movement, which they consider to be a platform to show the capacities of people with disabilities while serving as a catalyst for the rights of the disabled; guaranteeing integration, equality of opportunities and accessibility. Sport is presented as a benefit for people with disabilities, namely in the domain of self-esteem, perception of quality of life, self-efficacy, body image, strength and the motivation to continue to evolve (Blauwet & Willick, 2012; Frank, Land, & Schack, 2013).

In the context of business, many leaders use sporting terminology to describe their business situations, such as the term 'coaching', increasingly used in this area. Successful coaches are invited to join large companies under the explicit expectation that their principles of success in sport can be applied and transferred to the business world (Weinberg & McDermott, 2002).

It is, therefore, pertinent to understand the relationship between sporting skills and life skills. The present study aims to understand whether the skills acquired during sports training may have an impact in the future. The question of happiness, because of a process that reaches a positive psychological state, requires understanding the scope of positive psychology and other areas of knowledge.

### **The contributions of positive psychology**

Diener and Seligman (2002) report that studies on unhappy people are abundant in the literature, while studies on happy people are less common, due to the historical emphasis of clinical psychology on psy-pathology. This trend has now largely reversed. Positive psychology consists of the scientific study of positive emotions, strengths and human virtues. Its mission is to understand and promote these factors that allow people, communities and societies to blossom (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It emerged in the 1990s thanks to Martin Seligman, president of the American Psychological Association. It addresses strengths of character such as happiness, optimism, joy, satisfaction and hope, among other positive experiences (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Yunes, 2003) and considers that they have as much importance as unhappiness, depression and anxiety, among other negative aspects (Yunes, 2003).

The good functioning of life results from a combination of four domains: positive institutions (families, schools, clubs, businesses and communities), the development of positive relationships (friendship, matrimony, self-esteem, success and so forth), the arrival of positive aspects (strength of character, talents, interests and values) and positive subjective experiences (happiness, plenitude and flow); (Park et al., 2004). For authors such as Wong (2011), well-being, virtue, resilience and meaning are the four fundamental pillars of positive psychology.

### **The Concepts of Happiness, Quality of Life and Well-being**

For Csikszentmihalyi (1990:18) happiness does not happen, ‘In fact, happiness is a state which each one must prepare, grow and defend. People who know how to control the inner experience can determine the quality of their lives, which is the maximum they can approach from “being happy.”’

The term ‘quality of life’ emerged in the sixties as an instrument of American political propaganda, its purpose at the time was to promise a good life (Pereira, Teixeira, & Santos, 2012). During the Cold War, quality of life was mainly represented by the Fordism ideology, embodied by the possession of material goods such as a home, car and money. It is a concept of numerous and sometimes incongruous and subjective definitions, for which it is difficult to achieve one single definition because different people and authors value different things. Therefore, measuring and evaluating such a concept is a difficult task (Farquhar, 1995).

Felce and Perry (1995) consider that quality of life depends on the sum of a series of objective, measurable and experienced living conditions for an individual. Accordingly, they determined five key areas in measuring the quality of life: physical well-being, material well-being, social well-being, development and activity and emotional well-being. The processes underlying the measurement of happiness have led to the study of well-being by philosophers and thinkers throughout the centuries, such as Aristotle, Kant and Thomas Aquinas, among others (Diener, 1994; Diener, Sapyta, & Suh, 1998; Novo, 2005).

### **Well-being**

In the literature, the theme of well-being was often treated as the absence of pathology and positive indicators of well-being were reduced (Ryan & Frederick, 1997).

Researchers had been focused on studying the causes; recently they have focused instead on studying the consequences (Diener & Ryan, 2009). Well-being is nowadays associated with a mental health aspect, which is not the absence of mental disturbance but rather is framed in a positive dimension (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Ryan and Deci, 2001).

In our research, we have found a growing interest in the study of well-being. Waterman (1993) considers well-being to be a multidimensional concept, in the sense that it can be interpreted and evaluated as psychological well-being, subjective well-being, emotional well-being and physical well-being.

Furthermore, studies point to the fact that well-being and satisfaction with life lead to a significant increase in health and longevity, work and wages, social relations and in the benefits to society (Gunderman, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Happy people tend to be healthier, more efficient, more successful and volunteer more in society, companies and other organizations, both individual and governmental, allowing them to increase their performance as a result (Diener, Kesebir, & Lucas, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Well-being has been studied in two streams, one per happiness—subjective well-being that represents hedonic well-being and another per the human potential—psychological well-being that represents eudaimonic well-being (Caddick & Smith, 2014; Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007; Chatzisarantis

& Hagger, 2007; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). The two approaches to well-being, hedonia and eudaimonia, are based on different views of human nature (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Huta and Waterman (2014) argue that studying eudaimonia and hedonia is a considerable challenge. We emphasize this challenge because the multiplicity of conceptual and operational definitions is such that we easily enter a spiral of theories and concepts. This difficulty is related to the fact that hedonia and eudaimonia have been studied asymmetrically for some time.

The discussion of well-being is conducted in numerous articles, with different views and conceptions of the term. According to the statements of Huta and Waterman (2014) and by considering ourselves researchers and non-specialists, we will focus on the two traditional hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives. Thus, in this study, the concepts of hedonism and eudaimonism are concepts derived from philosophy and, currently, used in the social sciences in the study of well-being. While in philosophy, hedonism and eudaimonism are rivals of each other, in the social sciences, hedonia and eudaimonia are increasingly considered complementary.

### **Resilience**

Positive psychology addresses the development of psychological resilience as a promotion of mental health (Kobau et al., 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Several definitions have been proposed for the concept of resilience in the last 30 years (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012).

According to Yunes (2003), the concept of resilience is rooted in Physics and Engineering sciences, and concerns the notion of elasticity, considering tensile and compression capacity. The resilience of a material represents its ability to absorb deformation energy without subsequently suffering permanent deformation. More recently, the term resilience has been applied to psychology, in a most complex definition (Yunes, 2003), concerning the search to understand the factors that enable crisis and adversity to be overcome.

For Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000), resilience is 'a dynamic process that encompasses positive adaptation within a context of significant adversity' (p. 543). Luthar et al. (2000) recommend that resilience should be defined according to the specific context in which it is exhibited; because it depends on the cultural context, development and history, it becomes a complex concept requiring special attention towards the conceptual and operational definitions (Masten & Obradovic, 2006).

The way a person responds to adversity in a positive way depends on the adversities to which she has been exposed and on his own specific adaptation (Morgan, Fletcher, & Sarkar, 2013). Thus, we say the person is not inherently resilient but becomes so according to the need to overcome certain adversities, because resilience is learned and not acquired.

In this study, we intend to show how resilience can be enhanced as a result of sports practice, reinforcing the importance of sports practice for education and child development policies, to result in a better life for future adults.

Richardson (2002) proposed that research on resilience occurs in three waves. The first wave is characterized by the analysis of resilient qualities, including several characteristics such as self-esteem, self-efficacy and mental endurance, identified as characteristics that help people to be resilient. The second wave is the resilience process, that is, the study of how resilient qualities can be acquired enabling

a successful adaptation to adverse conditions. Finally, the third wave, the innate resistance, aims to understand the motivation necessary for the reintegration of people. Most resilience research on sport psychology focuses on the first wave (Galli & Vealey, 2008), as well as most resilience surveys in general (Richardson, 2002).

Ryff (2014) states that well-being is sometimes the result of an active battle with adversity. Personal growth often involves experiences with obstacles, failure and deception. Experiments like these are necessary to find internal strengths and to renew resources that allow you to know your own limitations and vulnerabilities at the same time.

With the increasing development and importance of the concept of resilience, many recent investigations have also emerged in the field of sport (Bejan & Tonita, 2014; Besharat, 2010; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Morgan, Fletcher, & Sarkar, 2015; Nicholls, Morley, & Perry, 2016; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014).

An elite athlete faces challenges of his own, not only in their social and personal life but also in training and competing. In their experience, athletes spend many hours in training, often involving repetitive gestures with implications for stress levels, recovery time from injuries that prevent them from performing and competitive anxiety complete with the agony of failing. For these reasons, athletes need physical endurance and talent but also mental endurance (Jones, Hanton, & Connaughton, 2002; Vallerand & Losier, 1999). In short, they must have a better and greater capacity to deal with challenges and adversities. Guillén and Laborde (2014) carried out a study in which they examined and established the differences in mental resistance between athletes and non-athletes.

Fontes and Brandão (2013) reinforced this idea that resilience is displayed throughout life from the interaction between risk and protection factors and because high-performance sport is an environment that exposes athletes to risk and stress, athletes strengthen their positive personal characteristics and social and affective support network effectively to overcome adversity and not abandon their careers too soon. Certain experiences, while painful, serve to strengthen personal resources to deal with different adverse situations. Athletes have important personal and sociocultural resources that enable them to respond successfully to adversity in sport and to develop resources that will permit them to respond successfully to adversity in the future (Fontes & Brandão, 2013). However, athletes, coaches and psychologists should be aware that the processes of developing and maintaining mental endurance are extended processes (Connaughton, Wadey, Hanton, & Jones, 2008). If athletes can effectively transfer all these capabilities into their daily and future lives, they are more likely to be successful professionals (Jones, 2002). This premise, being one of the objectives of our investigation, leads us to the need to understand what success is.

### **Success**

Happy people have fewer absenteeism behaviours and a lower tendency for unemployment (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008). A professional career is a very important factor in people's lives and impacts their happiness, through the salary they can earn, the positive evaluations by their superiors, their self-esteem and the social support provided by colleagues and supervisors.

It is important to be aware that satisfaction at work is concerned with the evaluation of a particular job while satisfaction with the career relates to an individual's assessment of his whole career development and promotion through various jobs and/or positions (Seibert & Kramer, 2001).

The scope of success in the context of happiness and well-being has been associated with the experience of positive emotions, and it has been sought to demonstrate that happy people enjoy more professional success, and this success is triggered by the experience of these positive emotions (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008).

Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener (2005) reviewed 225 studies that have shown that happier people achieve better outcomes in life, such as better relationships, financial success, physical and mental health, have more longevity and deal with challenges more effectively. These authors affirm that attributes related to positive effects encourage active involvement in the pursuit of goals, such as confidence, optimism, self-efficacy, sympathy, sociability, activity and energy, prosocial behaviour, physical well-being, coping with challenges and stresses and originality and flexibility.

However, in our view, success does not necessarily have to be restricted to working life. 'Being successful means doing things that are valued by the culture itself, flourishing in terms of the goals set by society itself' (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005, p. 822). In this study, we consider that being successful also includes personal fulfilment and the associated well-being.

Success has been studied in sporting contexts (White, Kavussanu, & Wingate, 2004), such as task orientation, for example, and its impact on the sporting outcome. In this review, we did not find any study proposing the connection of sports/physical activity practice with success in adult life, an issue that we aim to address in our research.

## **5. Research Methods**

The work described in this paper is part of a broader research project. Through a critical literature review on the most important keywords within peer-reviewed master list journals, we found the main connections among words such as resilience, well-being and success with sports practices. We also reviewed the main indicators and survey instruments used in related empirical studies, allowing us to enter metrics for those constructs. Based on those findings, we start to define our own model to measure the impact the sport activity of the past has on the perception of current success.

Methodological planning has already been carried out, with the translation and adaptation of a questionnaire into our language, which includes the retroversion to the English language by an independent translator and experts in the field, as well as a comparison of the two versions and correction. In this sequence, a pilot study was carried out to gauge the understanding and relevance of the questions, as well as the time needed to fill it in and other relevant aspects. This process was preceded by a request for authorization from the authors of the original questionnaire, followed by another questionnaire already adapted to our population (already requested). We also plan to apply and carry out complementary interviews to evaluate other dimensions of the sporting past (type of sport activity, individual and/or team, organized and/or non-organized, sports results, among others) and self-perception of success.

The application of this theoretical model will allow us to suggest practices for sports, education and social policies that will be indispensable in the future in areas such as people management, the business sector and in the general increase in the country's productivity.

## 6. Findings

The review showed us that resilience can be enhanced through sports practice, reinforcing the importance of sports practice in education and child development policies to result in better adults in the future. On the other hand, success attainment has been associated with the experiences of positive emotions and the capacity for resilience. The relationship of resilience, success and well-being with sports was only established with predictive intent, and unilaterally. We could find no attempt to integrate those variables and to consider past sports practice as an important tool for social public policies or/and business human resource management. Summarising the main findings, we can identify that:

- sports practice is an excellent method to acquire sports skills that can be transferred to the context of life skills, success and quality of life;
- positive emotions do increase personal resources that can be used later in other contexts, promoting well-being;
- positive experiences experienced in sports practice can be transformed into intellectual resources and social resources that can be used during adulthood, thus promoting well-being;
- resilience can be enhanced through sports practice, reinforcing the importance of sports practice in education and child development policies to result in better adults in the future; and
- the attainment of success has been associated with the experiences of positive emotions and the capacity for resilience.

## 7. Conclusion

Sport is much more important than simply a tool for health promotion. Through the literature review, it has been consistently confirmed that sports practices are an excellent means towards the acquisition of sports skills that can be transferred to the context of life skills, success and quality of life.

Achieving this delimited theoretical body, only the empirical and methodological approach of this subject are missing. We have identified no studies in the field of sport with these integrated strands (sports skills, well-being, resilience and success). Following the result of this review, we anticipate that it is possible to demonstrate that people who practised sport in childhood and adolescence experienced more positive emotions, developed better life skills and are now happier, more resilient and successful adults.

The experience of positive emotions has the effect of increasing personal resources that can be used later in other contexts, thus promoting well-being. In our understanding, the positive experiences felt in sports practice can be transformed into intellectual resources and social resources that can be used during adulthood, thereby promoting well-being.

The application of this theoretical model will allow us to suggest practices for sports, education and social policies that will be indispensable in the future in areas such as people management, the business sector and in the general increase in the country's productivity.

## Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the help of Santander Bank for their partial support for this research.

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