

ORIGINAL ARTICLE**Developing a Conceptual Model of Organizational Support for Sport Psychology: A Qualitative Study Based on Grounded Theory****Amir Dana*** 

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EXTENDED A B S T R A C T**Introduction**

Psychological well-being has become a fundamental component of athletic performance in contemporary sport, alongside physical conditioning and technical skills. However, the effectiveness of sport psychology interventions is highly dependent on the level of organizational support provided by sport institutions. In many developing and transitional sport systems, including Iran, organizational structures, leadership practices, and cultural norms often limit the systematic integration of psychological services. Despite growing recognition of mental skills training, few comprehensive models exist that explain how organizational factors facilitate or hinder sport psychology implementation. The present study aimed to design a conceptual model of organizational support for sport psychology within Iranian sport organizations. By exploring the experiences and perceptions of sport psychologists, coaches, and managers, this research sought to identify causal, contextual, and intervening factors, as well as effective strategies and outcomes, in order to provide a holistic framework for sustainable psychological support in competitive sport settings.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design based on grounded theory methodology using the Strauss and Corbin approach. The research was applied in nature and focused on developing a practical model for organizational support in sport psychology. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in Iranian sport organizations.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure rich and relevant information. The sample consisted of 12 experts, including four sport psychologists, four professional coaches, and four sport managers, all with extensive experience in elite and professional sport. Participants' ages ranged from 27 to 37 years, with professional experience between 5 and 12 years. Most held doctoral degrees,

ensuring high academic and professional credibility. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved.

Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were conducted individually in a confidential environment. The main guiding question focused on identifying organizational factors that support sport psychology, followed by questions regarding barriers, strategies, and outcomes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis followed three systematic stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During open coding, initial concepts were extracted from the transcripts. Axial coding was used to organize these concepts into broader categories, while selective coding integrated the categories into a coherent theoretical model.

To ensure trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, and confirmability were addressed. Member checking was conducted by returning transcripts and codes to participants. Peer debriefing involved collaboration with experts and independent coders. Reliability was assessed through re-coding procedures and Cohen's Kappa coefficient using SPSS. These strategies enhanced the rigor and validity of the qualitative findings.

Findings

Data analysis generated more than 185 initial codes, which were systematically organized into five major dimensions: causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. These dimensions formed the basis of the final organizational support model for sport psychology.

Causal conditions primarily included leadership support, structural support, resource prioritization, and policy support. Leadership involvement emerged as the most influential factor.

Leaders who actively participated in psychological programs, modeled positive attitudes, and emphasized mental skills created a supportive environment that legitimized sport psychology. Structural support, such as employing qualified psychologists and integrating them into team planning, enhanced accessibility and trust. Resource prioritization and formal policies further strengthened organizational commitment.

Contextual conditions consisted of organizational culture, team environment, type and level of sport, resource availability, and governance structures. A culture that valued mental health encouraged athlete engagement, while negative attitudes discouraged participation. Team dynamics, competition pressure, and sport type influenced the nature and intensity of psychological needs. Limited financial and physical resources constrained service delivery, even in supportive organizations.

Intervening conditions included time constraints, cultural barriers, resource limitations, communication gaps, leadership-policy inconsistencies, and athlete perceptions. Intensive training schedules often reduced opportunities for mental skills training. Cultural stigma surrounding psychological help, especially among male athletes, hindered utilization. Weak coordination among managers, coaches, and psychologists further reduced program effectiveness.

Several strategies were identified to enhance organizational support. These included leadership participation, coach involvement, integration of psychologists into teams, policy and program development, athlete participation, resource management, and educational initiatives. Leaders promoted psychological services through workshops and role modeling. Coaches reinforced mental skills during training. Psychologists adapted interventions to team culture and provided continuous feedback. Clear policies, transparent budgeting, and awareness programs supported long-term sustainability.

The implementation of these strategies produced multiple positive outcomes. Athletes reported improved psychological well-being, reduced stress, increased resilience, and greater confidence. Performance stability, concentration, and decision-making under pressure improved. Team cohesion and communication strengthened, leading to enhanced collective commitment. Engagement in mental skills programs increased, and organizations demonstrated improved readiness, accountability, and capacity for sustainable development.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that organizational support for sport psychology is a multidimensional and systemic process influenced by leadership, culture, structure, and resources. Consistent with organizational support theory, visible leadership commitment plays a central role in shaping athlete attitudes and engagement. The study highlights that psychological interventions cannot function effectively in isolation; rather, they must be embedded within organizational policies and daily practices. Cultural barriers and time constraints remain major challenges in Iranian sport, requiring targeted educational and managerial interventions. The proposed model extends existing literature by integrating causal, contextual, and strategic dimensions into a unified framework tailored to developing sport systems. Practically, the model provides managers, coaches, and policymakers with evidence-based guidance for institutionalizing psychological services. Future research should examine the quantitative impact of this model across different sport types and competitive levels.

KEYWORDS

Organizational Support, Sport Psychology, Athlete Well-being, Leadership, Qualitative Research, Performance Enhancement.

