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A Study of Emotional Intelligence Levels of Youth Athletes Participating in the National Youth Games Qualifying Round

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ABSTRACT : *This study aimed to examine the emotional intelligence (EI) levels of youth athletes participating in the National Youth Games qualifying round. The sample consisted of 400 athletes under 18 years old from region 5, selected from a population of 5,840 using Yamane's (1973) formula with a 95% confidence level and ±5% error. Stratified random sampling by gender and simple random sampling within strata were employed. The instrument was the Department of Mental Health's EI Assessment for Adolescents, covering three dimensions: good, smart, and happy, with an overall reliability of 0.97. Data were analyzed using percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Results showed that both male (M = 136.58 ± 1.00) and female athletes (M = 137.85 ± 0.98) scored below normal in overall EI. Specifically, the "good" dimension (positive thinking) was below normal for both genders (male = 45.03 ± 7.03; female = 45.75 ± 6.25), while the "smart" (emotional control and decision-making) and "happy" (stress management and calmness) dimensions were at normal levels. These findings suggest that although youth athletes demonstrated lower positive thinking, they were able to regulate emotions and maintain psychological well-being. In conclusion, EI development programs for youth athletes should emphasize enhancing positive thinking alongside emotional regulation and mental health to strengthen their potential and competitive readiness.*

KEYWORDS :- *Emotional Intelligence / Youth Athletes / National Youth Sports Qualifying Competition*

I. Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a key factor influencing success in various aspects of life, particularly in the context of youth athletes, who are in a period of development, both physically, mentally, and socially. The ability to recognize, understand, and regulate one's own emotions, as well as understand the emotions of others, is a crucial skill that impacts adaptability in competition, decision-making, and teamwork (Goleman, 2005; Petrides & Furnham, 2001).

Within the context of the National Youth Games qualifying rounds, recognized as a significant regional sporting event, the capacity of athletes to regulate their emotions effectively plays a critical role in fostering confidence, sustaining endurance, and enabling the full expression of physical capabilities (Lane et al., 2009). This is particularly relevant in the northern region, characterized by geographical and cultural diversity, which

presents athletes with multifaceted psychological and social challenges. Consistent with this perspective, Tongtab (2022) reported that emotional intelligence (EI) exhibits a positive correlation with physical activity and fitness while demonstrating a negative relationship with stress among overweight and obese adolescents, underscoring its relevance to mental health and physical well-being in youth populations. Additionally, Kaewchuay (2016) identified significant associations between EI and individual characteristics such as gender and sport type among athletes enrolled in the Institute of Physical Education. Findings revealed that female athletes demonstrated higher levels of EI than their male counterparts, and those participating in team sports exhibited greater EI levels compared to athletes in individual sports. The results of this study emphasize the importance of developing EI in youth athletes to enhance their adaptability and success in competition. Therefore, studying the emotional intelligence level of youth athletes participating in the National Youth Games qualifying round is important for understanding the role of EI in the context of regional competition. The results of this study will provide basic information to support appropriate sports psychology training planning and the development of emotional potential in youth athletes.

Objectives of the Research

To study the emotional intelligence level of youth athletes participating in the National Youth Games qualifying round.

II. Research methodology

This research is quantitative research using a survey research format to study the relationship between emotional intelligence of young athletes participating in the National Youth Games, Region 5 Qualifying Round. Data was collected through questionnaires that have been checked for validity and reliability. The research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee, Social Sciences and Behavioral Sciences, Bangkok Thonburi University, No. 2567/170 (17), dated October 9, 2024, as follows:

Sample Selection

1. Population and Sample

The population for this study consisted of youth athletes in region 5, aged under 18 years. They had continuously trained and participated in the 40th National Youth Games, Region 5 Qualifying Round (Lampang Games), held from November 1–10, 2014. A total of 5,840 participants were included, comprising 3,574 male athletes and 2,266 female athletes.

The sample consisted of youth athletes in region 5, aged under 18 years. The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1973) formula, with a 95% confidence level and a ±5% margin of error, as follows: $N = 5{,}840$ and $e = 0.05$ (±5% margin of error). Stratified random sampling was used to determine the appropriate proportion of male and female participants. Simple random sampling was used within each stratum, and data were checked for completeness before analysis. In order to obtain a sample group that is accurate and representative of the population, from the calculations, the sample size was 400 people, which is still within the appropriate criteria for quantitative research according to the guidelines of Comrey & Lee (2013) who suggested that a sample size of 300–500 people is considered sufficient for statistical data analysis.

Inclusion Criteria

Athletes under 18 years of age with continuous sports training experience who participated in the 5th National Youth Games, Lampang Games, and who consented to participate in the research and received parental permission in the case of minors.

Exclusion Criteria

Athletes who did not actually participate in the competition and athletes who did not consent or lacked completeness of the questionnaire data.

2. Research Instruments

The instrument used in this research was an Emotional Intelligence Assessment for Adolescents aged 12-17 years.

Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health (Department of Mental Health, 2000) divided into three dimensions: Positive (items 1-18) , Competent (items 19-36) , and Healthy (items 37-52) . The questionnaire contained 52 questions. Based on research, the questionnaire was divided into two sections:

Section 1: Personal Information of the Respondents (Checklist), including gender, age, education level, and type of sport they participated in.

Section 2: Emotional Intelligence Assessment for Adolescents aged 12-17 years. The assessment included three dimensions: Positive (self-control) , empathy, and responsibility; Competent (decision-making and problem-solving skills, motivation, and good relationships with others) ; and Healthy (self-esteem and satisfaction with life). There are 52 items of mental peace in the form of a 4-level rating scale questionnaire with the following meanings: 4 means having a high level of emotional intelligence, 3 means having a moderate level of emotional intelligence, 2 means having a relatively low level of emotional intelligence, and 1 means having a low level of emotional intelligence.

Research Variables

The independent variables consisted of gender (male and female).

The dependent variables consisted of emotional intelligence, positive, intelligent, and happy dimensions.

The total scoring criteria for each emotional intelligence dimension were as follows:

Positive

Scores below 48 = Below-normal emotional intelligence

Scores 48-58 = Normal emotional intelligence

Scores above 58 = Above-normal emotional intelligence

Competent

Scores below 45 = Below-normal emotional intelligence

Scores 45-57 = Normal emotional intelligence

Scores below 57 = Above-normal emotional intelligence

Health

Scores below 40 = Below-normal emotional intelligence

Scores 40-55 = Normal emotional intelligence

Scores below 55 = Above-normal emotional intelligence

Total Scoring Criteria for Emotional Intelligence According to the Department of Mental Health's Emotional Intelligence Assessment, the following applies:

Scores below 140 = Emotional Intelligence is below normal.

Total score 140-170 = Emotional Intelligence is normal.

Scores above 170 = Emotional Intelligence is above normal.

3. Research Procedures and Instrument Quality Assessment

The research data collection and instrument quality assessment procedures can be described as follows:

1. Questionnaire Validity Check

1.1 Study of Relevant Theories and Concepts: Before developing the questionnaire, researchers must thoroughly study relevant theories, concepts, academic literature, and research to ensure that the questions can comprehensively measure factors related to emotional intelligence in adolescent athletes aged 12–17 years, accurately, and align with the conceptual framework to be studied.

1. 2 Content Validity: The questionnaire was administered to five experts with expertise in sport psychology and measurement development to assess the appropriateness of the items. Content validity was assessed using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). The IOC was calculated based on the level of agreement among experts on each item. A typical IOC of ≥ 0.50 is considered passing. This assessment had an

overall reliability score of 0. 93, indicating high appropriateness. The questionnaire was analyzed into components. The positive component was 0. 75, the competence component was 0. 80, and the happiness component was 0.83.

2. Reliability Check

2. 1 The questionnaire was tested on a population similar to the actual sample, consisting of 30 participants. The trial allowed for identification of potentially confusing questions and assessment of question clarity.

2.2 The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient to test the internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire in this study. The Cronbach's Alpha value was α=0.97, which is considered very reliable (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021).

4. Data Collection

To ensure the research was effective and appropriate for the target group, the researcher conducted data collection according to the following steps:

1. Contact and Coordinate with the Sports Competition Organizing Committee. The researcher contacted and coordinated with the organizing committee of the 49th National Youth Games, Qualifying Round, Region 5, " Lampang Games," and explained the details of the research project to request cooperation in collecting data from the participating athletes.

2. Coordinate with Coaches and Parents. The researcher coordinated with the coaches and parents of the athletes to explain the objectives, procedures, and details of the research and to obtain consent from the athletes' parents for participation in the research by completing a questionnaire on emotional intelligence.

3. Data Collection. Questionnaires were collected 1-2 days before the competition and during breaks between competitions. The researcher avoided disrupting the athletes' competition time. The researcher clearly explained the importance and purpose of the questionnaires to the respondents. The questionnaires took approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

4. Data Review and Collection. After data collection, the researcher checked the completeness and accuracy of each questionnaire before compiling it for further data analysis.

5. Data Analysis

The researcher used descriptive statistics to describe the general characteristics of the data, including means, standard deviations, and percentages of individual data.

III Research Findings

The research results on the relationship between emotional intelligence of youth athletes participating in the National Youth Games qualifying round can be summarized as follows:

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Athletes (n = 400)

Information	Number (persons)	Percentage
1. Gender		
Male	263	65.80
Female	137	34.30
2. Age		
Under 12 years	55	13.75
12–14 years	105	26.25
15–17 years	143	35.75
18 years and above	97	24.25
3. Educational level		
Primary education	16	4.00

Lower secondary education	158	39.50
Upper secondary education	258	64.50
4. Type of competition		
Team events	265	66.30
Individual events	135	33.80
5. Sports experience		
Less than 1 year	95	23.75
1–3 years	245	61.25
4–6 years	48	12.00
More than 6 years	12	3.00

From Table 1, among the 400 respondents, the majority were male athletes (263 persons, 65.80%), while females accounted for 137 persons (34.30%). Most athletes were aged between 15–17 years (143 persons, 35.75%), and the majority were studying at the upper secondary education level (258 persons, 64.50%). Regarding the type of competition, most participated in team events (265 persons, 66.30%), while 135 athletes (33.80%) competed in individual events. In terms of sports experience, the majority had 1–3 years of experience (245 persons, 61.25%).

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of Emotional Intelligence of Youth Athletes Participating in the National Youth Games Qualifying Round by Gender (n = 400)

Emotional Intelligence Dimension	**Male** (n=263) $\bar{x} \pm$ S.D.	**Level**	**Female** (n=137) $\bar{x} \pm$ S.D.	**Level**
Good	45.03 ± 7.03	Below normal	45.75 ± 6.25	Below normal
Smart	48.03 ± 7.78	Normal	48.87 ± 7.52	Normal
Happy	43.51 ± 7.61	Normal	43.23 ± 7.61	Normal
Overall mean	136.58 ± 1.00	**Below normal**	137.85 ± 0.98	**Below normal**

From Table 2, the emotional intelligence of youth athletes participating in the National Youth Games qualifying round revealed that male athletes had an overall mean score of 136.58 ± 1.00, which was at a below-normal level, while female athletes had an overall mean score of 137.85 ± 0.98, also at a below-normal level. Considering each dimension, in the "Good" dimension, male athletes scored 45.03 ± 7.03 and female athletes 45.75 ± 6.25, both at a below-normal level. This indicates that both genders demonstrated lower-than-normal ability in positive thinking and emotional regulation in a positive manner. In the "Smart" dimension, male athletes scored 48.03 ± 7.78 and female athletes 48.87 ± 7.52, both within the normal level, suggesting that athletes of both genders were able to control emotions and exhibit appropriate behaviors in challenging situations. In the "Happy" dimension, male athletes scored 43.51 ± 7.61 and female athletes 43.23 ± 7.61, also at the normal level, indicating that youth athletes were able to maintain happiness and reduce stress within normal limits.

Table 3 Mean and Standard Deviation of Emotional Intelligence of Youth Athletes Participating in the National Youth Games Qualifying Round (n = 400)

Emotional Intelligence Dimension	$\bar{x}$	**S.D.**	**Level**
Good	45.28	1.04	Below normal
Smart	48.32	7.69	Normal
Happy	43.41	0.98	Normal
Overall mean	**137.01**	**0.99**	**Normal**

From Table 3, the analysis of emotional intelligence among youth athletes participating in the National Youth Games qualifying round revealed that the overall mean score of emotional intelligence was 137.01 ± 0.99, which was at a normal level. Considering each dimension, in the "Good" dimension, athletes had a mean score of 45.28 ± 1.04, which was below normal. In the "Smart" dimension, the mean score was 48.32 ± 7.69, which was at a normal level. In the "Happy" dimension, the mean score was 43.41 ± 0.98, also at a normal level. As shown in Figure 1

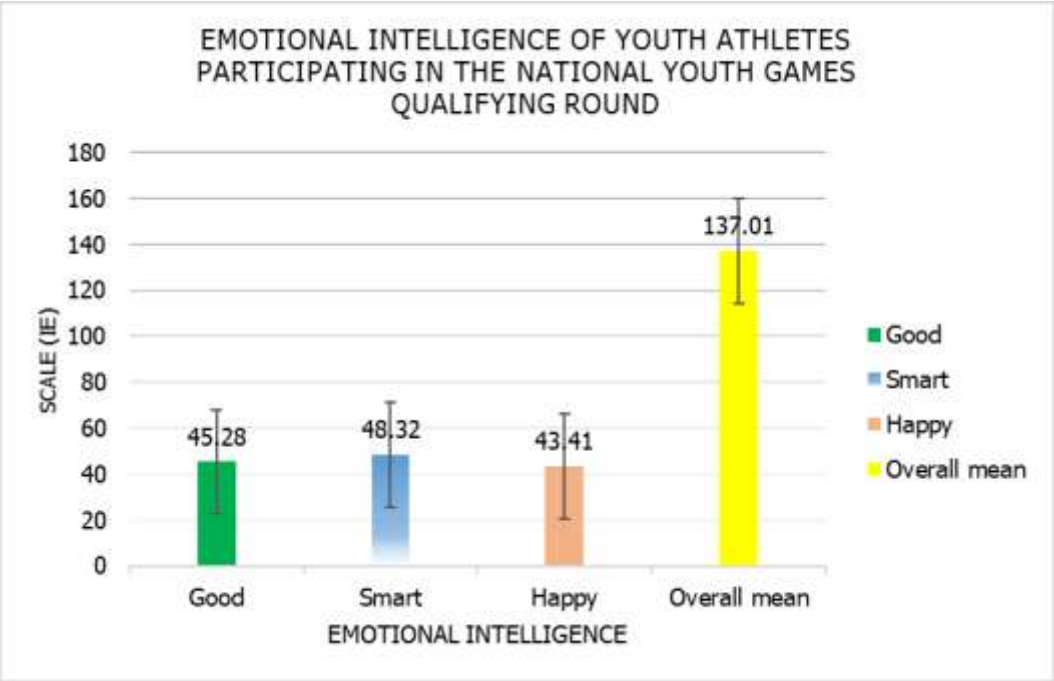

Figure 1 Emotional Intelligence of Youth Athletes Participating in the National Youth Games Qualifying Round

IV. Discussion

1. Discussion of the Findings

The study on the emotional intelligence (EI) levels of youth athletes participating in the National Youth Games qualifying round revealed that both male and female athletes had below-normal overall EI scores, with males scoring 136.58 ± 1.00 and females 137.85 ± 0.98. Although the "Smart" (emotional control and decision-making) and "Happy" (stress management and psychological well-being) dimensions were within the normal range for both genders, the " Good" dimension, which reflects positive thinking and the ability to regulate emotions constructively, was below normal for both males and females. This may indicate limitations among youth athletes in managing positive emotions and coping with failure, stress, and competitive pressure.

These findings align with Gould et al. (2002), who reported that youth athletes, still in emotional and social developmental stages, may demonstrate unstable emotional intelligence, particularly in self-regulation and accurate emotional appraisal, affecting training and competition performance. They also support Mayer et al. (2004), who emphasized that EI involves perceiving, understanding, and managing emotions, all of which directly influence behavior in sports, especially among adolescents who have not yet fully developed the ability to handle psychological pressure.

The findings underscore the imperative to systematically foster and enhance emotional intelligence (EI) among youth athletes, with particular emphasis on the " Good" dimension, which encompasses positive cognition, optimism, and adaptive emotional dispositions that facilitate resilience following adverse experiences, an essential competency for maintaining psychological stability in athletic contexts (Lane et al.,

2009). Consequently, the implementation of structured interventions or training programs aimed at cultivating emotional competencies is recommended for both male and female youth athletes to augment their capacity to manage high-stress competitive environments while concurrently promoting the development of athletic proficiency and psychological resilience.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study revealed that youth athletes competing in the National Youth Games qualifying rounds exhibited overall emotional intelligence (EI) levels below the normative standard, with a particular deficiency observed in the " Good" dimension, whereas the " Smart" and " Happy" dimensions remained within the normal range. These results indicate that, despite demonstrating adequate emotional regulation and mental well-being, youth athletes continue to encounter difficulties in cultivating an optimistic outlook and positive cognitive orientation. Accordingly, the implementation of targeted EI development programs should prioritize the enhancement of positive thinking and optimism in conjunction with sport-specific skill training, thereby strengthening athletes' overall potential and preparedness for high-pressure competitive environments.

Research Recommendations from the study

1. Training programs or activities should be organized to develop emotional intelligence, particularly in the area of positive thinking, for both male and female youth athletes.
2. Coaches should utilize information on gender differences in emotional intelligence in training designs to promote emotional regulation and decision-making skills. Furthermore, agencies involved in athlete development should continuously integrate psychology into the training process.

Recommendations for Future Research

1.Comparative studies should be conducted on emotional intelligence with other factors, such as competitive experience, age, or sport type, and samples should be drawn from diverse regions or competition levels to increase data diversity.

2.Qualitative tools, such as interviews, should be used to gain a deeper understanding of athletes' feelings and emotional experiences.

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