

The Relationship Between Injury and Motivation in Pickleball Players

Barbara Cazzolli^{1,2}, Barbara Chaparro³, Christina Frederick³, Abigail Threatt³

¹ Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy

² University of Florence, Florence, Italy

³ Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, United States

Purpose: Although the health benefits of physical activity across all ages are well-established, 27.5% of the world's population does not achieve recommended physical activity levels. Psychological and motivational characteristics driving participation in physical activity are studied; however, less is known about barriers such as injuries. Pickleball is the fastest-growing sport in the US, played by people of all ages, in which injuries are increasing. Despite research on motivational drives and pickleball health benefits, little is known about players' injuries and how they relate to those limits. This study aims to define the relationship between motivation and injury, how it varies across ages, and how players experience and recover from injury.

Methods: This study used a self-reported methodology in which 472 pickleball players completed an online survey posted on Prolific. The survey included the ENJOY Scale, a motivational scale of five factors, and items querying physical injury type and status. Differences in motivation levels and injury status across interest groups were analysed using ANOVAs and qualitative analyses.

Results: Results reveal that injured pickleball players have higher levels in each ENJOY dimension (Pleasure, Relatedness, Competence, Improvement, and Engagement) than those who are not. According to that, most of the injured sample reported continuing to play despite the pain and not reducing the frequency, thereby enhancing the risk of getting severe injuries due to misuse. Moreover, the most common strategies for injury recovery that pickleball players use are: body supports covering the lower part; seeking the care of medical and health experts; using professional equipment and practicing physical activity off the court.

Conclusion: These findings shed light on a fast-growing sport mostly played by amateurs across all ages, where motivational drivers relate to injury risk in line with the literature on sports. Showing how enjoyment leads players to ignore pain, this study contributes to understanding factors that enable and limit health-enhancing physical activity. These results help professionals to design targeted interventions that promote healthy and safe participation in pickleball, considering both positive and negative aspects.

Support/Funding Source: Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach Campus, Florida, US.

