

The INSHS 13th International Christmas Sports Scientific Conference (digital)
1-3 December 2021



MENTAL TOUGHNESS OF YOUNG FOOTBALL PLAYERS: DIFFERENCES REGARDING THEIR AGE AND SPORTS EXPERIENCE

Tonća Jukić¹, Dora Mimica¹, Biljana Popeska²

¹Department of Pedagogy, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split, Split, Republic of Croatia

²Department of Humanities, Faculty of Educational Sciences, University Goce Delcev Stip, Stip, Republic of North Macedonia

tjukic@ffst.hr, dmimica@ffst.hr, biljana.popeska@ugd.edu.mk

INTRODUCTION

sports

football

professional level

success

AIM

young
football
players

age

null-hypotheses

sports
experience

sacrifice

motivation

belief

...

MENTAL TOUGHNESS

one of the key characteristics related to an individual's success in elite sports (Liew et al., 2019)

„the presence of some or the entire collection of experientially developed and inherent values, attitudes, emotions, cognitions, and behaviours that influence the way in which an individual approaches, responds to, and appraises both negatively and positively construed pressures, challenges, and adversities to consistently achieve his or her goals”
(Coulter, Mallet & Gucciardi, 2010, p. 715)

METHODS (i)

Realization

- 2021
- One football club in Republic of Croatia

Instrument

- *Adapted version on Cricket Mental Toughness Inventory* (CMTI, Gucciardi & Gordon, 2009)
Adapted on football context

Data analyses

- Basic descriptive statistics
- T – test for independent samples

METHODS (i)

SAMPLE

Tables 1-3 Young football players' socio-demographic characteristics

Table 1

Category	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Age	87	12.00	18.00	14.47	2.15
Sports experience	85	3.00	12.00	7.99	2.01

Table 2

Age	f	%
12 – 14 years	51	58.6
16 – 18 years	36	41.4

Table 3

Sports experience	f	%
3 – 7 years	37	43.5
8 – 12 years	48	56.5

METHODS (ii)

INSTRUMENT

Table 4 Metric characteristics of *Cricket Mental Toughness Inventory* (CMTI, Gucciardi & Gordon, 2009) adapted to football context (1-7 Likert scale, legend: 1 false, 100% of the time – 7 true, 100% of the time)

Subscale	Item N	Item Example	Subscale Cronbach alpha	Subscale M	Subscale SD	Subscale Variance
1. Affective intelligence	3	<i>I have high emotional stress tolerance.</i>	0.645	15.59	3.95	15.59
2. Desire to achieve	3	<i>I am willing to go the extra mile to succeed.</i>	0.825	19.86	2.19	4.79
3. Resilience	3	<i>I have the ability to bounce back from setbacks.</i>	0.755	17.33	3.29	10.82
4. Attentional control	3	<i>I remain focused during adversity.</i>	0.488	19.95	2.38	5.65
5. Self-belief	3	<i>I never experience doubts about my ability.</i>	0.722	16.64	3.74	14.02

RESULTS (i)

Table 5 Scores on mental toughness subscales (M, SD)

Subscale	N	Min	Max	M	SD
2. Desire to achieve	87	3.00	7.00	6.62	0.73
4. Attentional control	87	4.00	7.00	5.98	0.79
3. Resilience	87	2.67	7.00	5.78	1.10
5. Self-belief	87	1.33	7.00	5.55	1.25
1. Affective intelligence	87	1.67	7.00	5.19	0.32

RESULTS (ii)

Table 6 Results of the independent samples t-test for testing differences in the mental toughness of young football players with regard to players' age

Subscale	12-14 years M (SD)	16-18 years M (SD)	t	df	p
1. Affective intelligence	5.12 (1.45)	5.29 (1.11)	0.598	85	0.551
2. Desire to achieve	6.64 (0.65)	6.59 (0.84)	-0.300	85	0.765
3. Resilience	5.98 (1.01)	5.49 (1.15)	-2.090	85	0.040*
4. Attentional control	6.07 (0.78)	5.86 (0.80)	-1.226	85	0.224
5. Self-belief	5.35 (1.26)	5.82 (1.19)	1.755	85	0.083

RESULTS (iii)

Table 7 Results of the independent samples t-test for testing differences in the mental toughness of young football players with regard to players' sports experience

Subscale	3-7 years M (SD)	8-12 years M (SD)	t	df	p
1. Affective intelligence	5.24 (1.12)	5.19 (1.45)	0.167	83	0.867
2. Desire to achieve	6.72 (0.41)	6.57 (0.89)	0.953	83	0.343
3. Resilience	6.12 (0.73)	5.54 (1.22)	2.496	83	0.015*
4. Attentional control	6.18 (0.69)	5.85 (0.85)	1.897	83	0.061
5. Self-belief	5.35 (1.25)	5.77 (1.98)	-1.567	83	0.121

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Diverse relations among variables in different sports:

- no differences in MT regarding age (Özdemir, 2019)
- MT increased with age and sports experience (Cowden & Meyer-Weitz, 2015; Nicholls et al., 2009)
- resilience increased with age (Blanco-Garcia et al., 2021)
- resilience positively related to sports experience (González-Hernández et al., 2020)

MENTAL TOUGHNESS

affective intelligence +

desire to achieve +

attentional control +

self-belief +

resilience: X

Younger players and players with less sports experience show higher resilience in sports

competitiveness

self-confidence

pressure

focus on sports
results

differentiated
coaching
approach

AIM

young
football
players

age

null-hypotheses X

sports
experience

Recommendation for practice

- ❑ Different sources of stress and different level of exposure of stress between younger and elite athletes leads to different resilience (Hanton et al, 2005).
- ❑ Younger athletes are less exposed to stress, have experienced less setbacks and less difficulties in sport so express higher resilience.
- ❑ Exposure to stress could be a negative component in youth sport (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009)



What can be done?

Provide support from coaches

Create a positive training environment

Careful and step by step exposure of athletes to tense situations during the training

Provide supportive communication that demonstrates belief in athletes

Goal setting can increase motivation and resilience

Support positive thinking



THANK YOU!

Greetings from Croatia and North Macedonia!

TONĆA JUKIĆ	tjukic@ffst.hr ,
DORA MIMICA	dmimica@ffst.hr
BILJANA POPESKA	biljana.popeska@ugd.edu.mk