



**MEDIATING EFFECT OF MENTAL HEALTH IN THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN ATHLETIC IDENTITY AND PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT
TOWARDS CAREER PLANNING AMONG MALAYSIAN SECONDARY
SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETES**

By

WONG KAI YAN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**December 2023
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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2023

Chairperson : Wan Marzuki Bin Wan Jaafar, PhD
Faculty : Educational Studies

Athletes' life is full of challenges and pressures because they are more inclined with stressors like injury, performance pressure, high internal and external expectations, and difficulties during transition. Eventually, excellent student-athletes' may withdraw from the school sport programs or at worse, drop out from school, which is a big loss for the country. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the current Malaysian student-athlete's extent to athletic identity, mental health, perceived social support towards career planning (career optimism, career adaptability, career knowledge, college and career readiness self-efficacy and self-efficacy planning). The objectives of this research are to develop a model to support the helpfulness between counselling to upper secondary school student-athletes in terms of their career planning through determine the relationships between the exogenous and endogenous variables. The present study would be conducted in quantitative way, and made use of descriptive-correlational research design as well as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to develop a model. Furthermore, survey questionnaire was used to collect data for

analysis, in addition, this study employed Athletics Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS), Mental Health Continuum- Short Form (MHC-SF), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and Career and Tertiary Education Readiness Inventory (CaTERI) as researcher-adapt instruments. Experts were invited to validate the translated instruments, meanwhile sport experts and counselling experts were invited to validate the content of the instrument. The target population is form 4 and form 5 student-athlete, through cluster sampling method, the student the student-athletes from sports upper secondary school would be recruited to participate in the study, in addition, data collection will be initiated through the “fishbowl” method to select the sports secondary schools based on the divided 5 zone, hence, through school visiting to collected the pilot study and actual study data. Eventually, 389 student-athletes participated in the current study, the status are mostly high and rather high in athletic identity, mental health and perceived social support, while career planning level among Malaysian secondary school student-athletes are at mediator and high level, there have been found all positive and significant relationship towards the career planning and mental health was found could be the mediator mediating the relationship between athletic identity and perceived social support towards career planning among Malaysia sport upper secondary schools’ student-athletes. The implications of this research extend to all the sport stakeholder such as the policymakers, administrators, and education programs, providing actionable recommendations through review the impact of mental health levels during the career counselling session with student-athletes.

Keyword: Sport counselling, athletic identity, mental health, perceived social support, career planning,

SDG: GOAL 4: Quality Education

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia Sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KESAN PENGANTARA KESIHATAN MENTAL DALAM HUBUNGAN
ANTARA IDENTITI ATLET DAN TANGGAPAN SOKONGAN SOSIAL
TERHADAP PERANCANGAN KERJAYA DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR-
ATLET SEKOLAH MENENGAH DI MALAYSIA**

Oleh

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Kehidupan atlit penuh dengan cabaran dan tekanan kerana mereka lebih cenderung dengan tekanan seperti kecederaan, tekanan prestasi, jangkaan dalaman dan luaran yang tinggi serta kesukaran semasa peralihan. Akhirnya, atlet pelajar yang cemerlang mungkin menarik diri daripada program sukan sekolah atau lebih teruk lagi, tercicir dari sekolah, yang merupakan satu kerugian besar bagi negara. Oleh itu, penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat tahap pelajar-atlet Malaysia semasa terhadap identiti atlet, kesihatan mental, tanggapan sokongan sosial terhadap perancangan kerjaya (optimum kerjaya, penyesuaian kerjaya, pengetahuan kerjaya, efikasi sendiri kesediaan kolej dan kerjaya dan perancangan efikasi sendiri). Objektif penyelidikan ini adalah untuk membangunkan model untuk menyokong bantuan antara kaunseling kepada atlet pelajar sekolah menengah atas dari segi perancangan kerjaya mereka melalui menentukan hubungan antara pembolehubah eksogen dan endogen. Kajian ini akan dijalankan secara kuantitatif, dan menggunakan reka bentuk penyelidikan deskriptif-korelasi serta Pemodelan Persamaan Struktur (SEM) untuk membangunkan

model. Tambahan pula, soal selidik tinjauan digunakan untuk mengumpul data untuk dianalisis, di samping itu, kajian ini menggunakan Skala Pengukuran Identiti atlet (AIMS), Continuum Kesihatan Mental- Bentuk Pendek (MHC-SF), Skala Multidimensi Sokongan Sosial yang Dipersepsikan (MSPSS) dan Kerjaya dan Inventori Kesediaan Pendidikan Tertiary (CaTERI) sebagai instrumen yang disesuaikan dengan penyelidik. Pakar telah dijemput untuk mengesahkan instrumen terjemahan, manakala pakar sukan dan pakar kaunseling dijemput untuk mengesahkan kandungan instrumen. Populasi sasaran dalam kajian ini adalah pelajar atlet daripada tingkatan 4 dan tingkatan 5, melalui kaedah persampelan kelompok, pelajar atlet dari sekolah menengah sukan akan dipilih untuk menyertai kajian, selain itu, pengumpulan data dalam memilih sekolah menengah sukan berdasarkan lima (5) zon yang telah dibahagikan. Justeru, proses mengumpul data kajian rintis juga kajian sebenar telah dilaksanakan melalui lawatan sekolah. Seramai 389 pelajar atlet telah mengambil bahagian dalam kajian, status kebanyakannya tinggi dan agak tinggi dalam identiti atlet, kesihatan mental dan tanggapan sokongan sosial, manakala tahap perancangan kerjaya dalam kalangan pelajar atlet sekolah menengah Malaysia berada pada tahap sederhana dan tinggi sahaja, didapati bahawa pembolehubah tak bersandar ada hubungan positif dan signifikan terhadap perancangan kerjaya, pada masa yang sama, kesihatan mental didapati boleh menjadi *mediator* antara identiti atlet dan tanggapan sokongan sosial terhadap perancangan kerjaya dalam kalangan pelajar-pelajar sekolah menengah sukan Malaysia. Implikasi penyelidikan ini meluas kepada semua pihak yang berkepentingan sukan seperti penggubal dasar, pentadbir, dan program pendidikan, dapatan kajian memberikan cadangan yang boleh diambil tindakan dalam mengaji kesan tahap kesihatan mental semasa sesi kaunseling kerjaya dengan pelajar atlet.

Kata kunci: Kaunseling sukan, identiti alet, kesihatan mental, tanggapan sokongan sosial, perancangan kerjaya,

SDG: *GOAL 4: Quality Education*



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the background of the study. This study aims to examine athletic identity, mental health status and perceived social support towards career counselling, especially in career planning (career optimism, career adaptability, career knowledge, career college readiness self-efficacy and self-efficacy planning) among sports upper secondary school student-athletes. Then, this chapter provides a clear background of the issues of the study. Towards the end of the chapter, problem statement; objectives, hypotheses, significance of study, scope and limitation, and definitions of terms of the study are presented.

1.1 Background of Study

The study revolves around several main areas; career planning, adolescence and sport, athletic identity, mental health, and perceived social support. A more detail presentation of each aspect would provide a better understanding of each aspect and, how these variables are interrelated and affecting one another.

1.1.1 Career Planning

Career counselling is often misconceived due to the word “counselling”, as it implies providing someone advise, recommendations or suggestions from a knowledgeable counsellor or friend. In fact, in the career counselling process, the client’s abilities, interests and personality will be analysed to construct a career plan that suits the client with work that resembles their abilities, interests and personality about the world-of-work (Hirschi & Froidevaux, 2020). On account of Duarte, (2017), further elaborated

the history of career counselling which had existed since Ancient Greek as the strategy to avoid poverty among community members, at the same time, assist those who found it difficult to survive in a job.

Career counselling is a specialized application of counselling psychology related to supporting individuals with education, market products to meet their career goals (Hirschi, & Froidevaux, 2020; Roy, 2020). Then in the 21st Century, during industrial revolution guidance were given to youth so that they could strive to live in the difficult time. Now there is a clear divide between vocational and career counselling, and career counselling has become a discipline by itself in many western countries (Cheung, 2009). The postmodern era at the beginning of the 20th century is different from the current 21st century. The current 21st century's world of work is becoming increasingly complex and unstable, which brings a lot of challenges to an individual facing difficulty in planning their career pathway, indirectly, affected their live plan.

Therefore, the society urgently needs guidance and counselling, especially career counselling, through career counselling personal growth and personal guidance can assist youth understand the shift of skills requirements in the transition from school to work (Jenschke, 2004; Schmid, et al., 2023). Career planning is playing an important element in counselling competence at this 21st century to assist people and the society to enlighten their life choice difficulty in choosing a career, in addition, career planning as part of career development continuing identify as a core area in career counselling competence (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2017; Jackson, et al., 2020). Globally, athletes who own a poor performance will affect their sponsorship and may put them to contemplate early retirement. Therefore, athletes need career planning to manage and

protect their crown or may be a backup plan to shine again in other sports-related careers (Dehghansai, et al., 2021).

In sports, sports counselling is emphasized on the development of the athlete as an individual, despite of the similarities with sport psychologist, sport counsellor would also be working mainly with stakeholder in the sport field such as athletes, experts and the managerial staff. Sport counsellor would offering specialized counselling services that including provide view to solve difficult professional situations derived from sport performance activity promote the personal image, manage the training process and the sport structures as well as assisting to enhance sport performances and foster the understanding of work relations in sports (Bădău, 2014; Badau & Badau, 2020).

In short, this study aims to look at the interconnectedness between career planning in sports careers in terms of career optimism, career adaptability, career knowledge, career and college readiness self-efficacy and self-efficacy planning selected emotional well-being, social well-being and psychological well-being variables among upper secondary school student-athletes.

Sports Careers

Student-athletes possess to be passionate about their sport and many student-athletes are wished to become a professional athlete (Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Boyle & Haynes, 2000). Careers of sports professionals are those athletes who have earn a living from sports crafts (Coupland, 2016). Although these athletes have retired, they still have a strong interest in their sports. Therefore, they will be become personal trainers, consultants or even lecturers

and continue to teach the sports skills they have learned to the younger generation.

The transition from an elite athlete to a former athlete symbolizes (i) Sarina Sundara Rajah is a former national gymnast and is currently the founder of the Sarina Rhythmic Gymnastics Club (SRGC) and SyNaPseCloud, which aims to increase the awareness, engagement and participation of athletic women and girls in rhythmic gymnastics; (ii) Datuk Nicole Ann David, is a retired Malaysian squash player also the greatest women's player in the history , currently starts a foundation named "Nicol David Organisation" to supports children B40 and M40 in learning squash and life skills (Teoh, 2022); (iii) Former Malaysian bowling queen, Datuk Shalin Zulkifli, she owns and runs a Tenpin Bowling Alley at The Cure, Mutiara Damansara, to continue and passing down her passion in bowling to others.

Last but not least, according to Stout, (2018), it is recommended to conduct more research comparing Division I, II and III collegiate athletes, as this might reveal the differences across divisional levels of collegiate athletics. Therefore, in Malaysia context, the current research will measure the career planning in sports careers of Malaysia student-athletes from the national sports schools and the states sports schools.

Professional Careers

In the context of the research, professional career is opposing to the sports career. As mentioned earlier, some student athletes ambiguously refer to their

sport as their future careers. According to Choi & Kim, 2021, less than 10% of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletes can become professional athletes. However, the reality of becoming a professional athlete is not an easy task. During the journey, many factors contributed to the idea of “retirement”, such as experience serious injuries, team deselection, or some student-athletes just appeared to have different career plans. Because they are well-trained players, but they didn't even think about becoming players or coaches, they just wanted to become other professions.

There are two (2) types of athletes, amateur athletes are also known as recreational athletes. Unlike professional athletes, there is a significant difference in sports training sessions and perceptions towards career planning (Piermattéo, et al., 2020). Student-athletes appeared different career planning, some wish to become professional athletes, while some will consider various factors when cogitate about their subsequent phrase of their career and life planning.

Nevertheless, there is shorter time frame career to become a professional athlete, and there is shorter player list selection after secondary school. Thus, some athletes would be decided to withdraw from their existing athletes career life earlier, this is the reason of some student-athlete would be applied for ordinary secondary schools instead of entering sports secondary school, as they have excellence performance in their sports, but they have different ambitions to chase rather than become a professional athlete. Therefore, these athletes would “retire” immediately after graduating their secondary school and

continue their career planning, with courses such as diploma or foundation courses.

The transformation of from elite athletes to other professional are symbolizes by (i) Professor Dato' Dr. Shamala K. Subramaniam, a formal Malaysia hockey player, now has become a Professor in Department of Communication Technology and Networking at Universiti Putra Malaysia, (ii) Datuk Leong Mun Yee, a former Malaysia Diver, now has started a diving academy, consider to striving a new challenge between a business lady or coach, (iii) Nazmizan Muhammad is a formal Malaysian sprinter, Deputy Director of Sports & Recreation Centre, Universiti Malaysia Perlis and Chief Assistant Senior Secretary in Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education.

In short, career planning is a practical challenge for every individual, the severity leads to unemployment and job loss, especially to teenagers who are generally less capable in terms of academics. Thus, in the current phenomenon, the intention of student athletes in career planning is definitely one of the most important elements to acknowledge, whether the plan is towards sports or professional.

1.1.2 Student-Athletes

Every parent wants their children to be healthy, smart and successful in their life. Unfortunately, Sport can be one of the means because sport participation contributes to positive development of mind and body leading to higher self-confidence, and self-esteem. In fact, early participation in sport during young adulthood is proved to be improved physical and psychological well-being (Collins, et al., 2018), therefore, able

parents will do what they can to support their children in academic, extracurricular and sports and recreational activities.

In a developing nation like Malaysia, academic excellence is a priority because it is a passage for university education and good careers. If the good ones have talent in sport that is normally given secondary preference because academic excellence is the priority for good careers in the later years, for instance a ticket for entrance university or college (Ghanad, et al., 2017). As a result, the students who are better in academic are less involved in sports and if they do, it is just for recreational and physical well-being. Most of them have little intention to pursue it as a career, unless they are supported or encouraged by their parents. This situation leave serious sport involvements to adolescents who are generally less able academically.

During the growing process, parent play an important role in student learning behaviours, spending time with children is crucial to better academic performance, so, students' parents who are working for more hours to make ends meet and they are normally less attended and have to take care of themselves much earlier due to the absence of their parents (Grabmeier, 2019). Also stated by Li & Qiu, 2018, parent involvement in children's' education is impacted to students' learning attitude. However, as parents busy in their working life, the situation provides them with more opportunity to mingle with peers and normally they live in the vicinity of the same backgrounds, and student performance in school is great impact from the mingling and influence by peer and the environment (Li & Qiu, 2018). To pass away time or to fulfill their natural needs or hobby, they play various games together within the available space they have. Since they play soccer or badminton every day, for example, they

become skillful and physically fit. In school, it would naturally be easier for them to be chosen as school players in soccer, badminton, hockey etc. Consequently, they become the schools' heroes when sports are concerned, but not in academic. Naturally, their parents, their teachers too, would encourage them to pursue sport if there is an opportunity; one of which is to join the Malaysia Sports Schools.

1.1.3 Athletic Identity

Athletics is an athlete's sports talent which performs extraordinary better than the others, to an athlete, their athletics is their brand, which people would recognize them by their athletics, brands. For instance, Tiger Woods, his athletics is golf, Michael Jordan, his athletics is basketball, Lee Chong Wei, his athletics is badminton. However, athletics identity is the player level of perception on self-identity with the athlete's role and acknowledgement of the athlete's role from others (Brewer, et al., 1993).

Besides, athletics identity could make an athlete become more self-disciplined and responsible in avoiding themselves in engaging maladaptive behaviour, because they are aware of their identity as they are a representative. Nevertheless, athletic identity is related to the role identities, especially as an athlete. Athlete would acquire a certain sense of "I am an athlete" throughout their competition's life in sport, whether they are strong or weak, for instance, an athlete's successful performance in a game may help improve self-esteem, so the athlete would have a strong sense of athletic identity and vice versa (Martin, et al., 1997).

However, a strong sense of athletic identity will help athlete to be more likely to establish relationships with other athletes and reduced burnout. On the contrary, the disadvantage of strong athletic identity is that the athlete would be hardly adapt themselves during the transition of transit from athletic role into other career outside of the sport (Berg, 2018). Anyway, everyone has at least one but could have multiple identities at the same time, a sport man at the same time might be a teacher, a student, mother, a father, a son, a daughter, and also it is important to know your identity in order to make you alert with your role and your responsibilities (Symes, 2010). However, in the current study, the researchers are interested in study regarding student-athlete, which is focus on athletic identity and the relationship between student-athletes and career counselling in terms of student-athletes' career planning.

In short, numerous studies had examined athletic identity, in spite of that, all athletes would experience a period of transition where they have to give up their sport and go into another career, it might be related to sport, or it might also totally new. Therefore, the current study would be examining the sports upper secondary school student-athletes' athletic identity and predict their career future.

1.1.4 Mental Health in Student-Athletes

Mental health is the pandemic of the 21st century and will be the next major global health challenge (Lake & Turner, 2017). For so many years this phenomenon has been taken for granted and non-existence because many people do not have the basic knowledge about it (Henderson, et al., 2013; Foulkes & Andrews, 2023). Any abnormal behaviours among children and adolescents tend to be regarded as deviance and rebel by most adults.

As far as the current situation is concerned, the invasion of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) is a pandemic disease that had a staggering impact on the global economy, public health and safety as well as education. In education the safety and well-being of students is the utmost important issue (Sulaiman, et al., 2021). Thus, sports schools are force closed, indirectly, student-athletes are forced to take a break from training or physical activity until further notice. During the Covid-19 pandemic, school activities could be described as increased screen time but decreased in physical activity, the changes in the school activity's structure led to a decline in mental health among youth (Shepherd, et. al., 2021). In addition, in school training repercussions, the cancellation of games and competitions has an impact on student-athletes' athletic identity and their perceived social support because there is a lack of "tool" for fostering the perceived identity and the "bridges" between the team supports is missing (Bas, et.al., 2020; Shepherd, et al., 2021).

Generally speaking, the society not aware of its existence over the years, mental health has grown as a discipline by itself. It used to be a component of psychology and gradually it has become an independent entity as a discipline by itself. This is due to the growth of mental related illness that is getting more and more significant. When more and more fatal and unfortunate incidents happen, the concern becomes more serious and it is regarded as a serious illness (Gaston, et.al., 2019). As such, it needs to be determined and treated as early as possible and many developed countries has put this as one of their main health agendas.

However, many people tend to ignore and assume that all children and adolescents are the same, unless they are mentally and physically handicapped. This must change and

we must really understand and take appropriate attitude and step so that this issue can be managed and if possible, minimized for the benefit of our adolescents and the nation at large. For instance, a hindered negative mental health status might have affected learning and caused an unsatisfactory academic performance, eventually the student would down and may cause demotivation and negative attitudes that affect attentiveness, motivation, drive, perseverance, cooperation and team spirit. In the context of sport schools, sport persons and athletes are likely experience mental health issue such as anxiety and depression which is high-prevalence, and others mental health issue are eating disorder, substance use, these mental health issue would be similar contribute negative effect to the student athlete such as withdraw from sports participant (Rice, et. al., 2016).

On top of that, there is no specific medical treatment that can be applied to manage mental health issues like preventing or protecting oneself from fever, cough, or even cancer. There is no medicines and antibiotics to take to control the mental healthiness. Since it is there, every effort must be taken to manage the illness. This situation is very unfortunate and threatening the future of the student concerned. They seem to be generalized as one having mental problem but no specific progressive treatment can be suggested right away. More often than not the symptoms are submerged under the standard of most student. Many of them grow as child, then adolescents among normal others and regarded as normal like others. They are to think, react and behave like others too. If they behave and reacts to the environmental phenomenon differently, they are regarded as deviants, rebellious and anti-social.

1.1.5 Perceived Social Support

Perceived Social Support is an individual aware of his or her surrounding people's helpfulness and level of support gained through their family and social networking. Perhaps, social networking might interpreted as the people we know, such as friends, teachers and coaches, social support could be also came in such a way from media social networking, for instances, interaction between a bloggers and audiences, communications and comments is sort of social support, through the interactions, the blogger who vent out their trouble might gain supportive comments, without preamble such social support obtain the benefits to boost the blogger's self-confident, self-esteem and enhance self-understanding. Vice versa, audiences respond the other way by comment negatively, then negative effect might be promoted (Ko, et al., 2013).

However, Perceived Social Support is playing an important role in individual's life, either visible or invisible. Sometime, people could feel down after went through a hectic day, but some people feel better meeting their parents; some people would be getting better after happy hours with friends after work; or some people might just drop a call to a significant friend and express then he/she will be alright, these magic behind the scene is because the support from others empower us to get away from negative mood. However, perceived social support could be come from varieties way, for instance, the supports could from foods or encouragements. It is important to aware the social support because negative representations of self are disrupted which cause reduced psychological consequences by avoiding the gain generated from healthy social relationships (Lane & Fink, 2015).

A similar situation is described to student-athletes, they need supports. Every athlete in the development of career planning are vulnerable to mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, for this perceived social supports is crucial to them (Knowles, et al., 2021). This is because the encouragement and nurturing of relationships from a significant people contribute to the better development of adolescents (Migunde,2020). Moreover, research results show that social interaction and support are related to transformations in athletic identity and mental health status (Graupensperger, et al., 2020).

Therefore, several studies have been conducted in western populations or among collegiate/university student-athletes (Lally & Kerr, 2005; Rodriguez, 2012; Martin, 2018; López-Flores, et al., 2021; Coffin, et al., 2021). An in-depth understanding of the athletic identity, mental health as well as the perceived social support that affect the career planning of upper secondary schoolstudent-athletes has not been explored, especially among the Malaysia population.

1.2 Problem Statement

Sports careers are short and competitive, some sports like badminton, tennis, swimming, diving, and athletics are open to a limited number of persons. According to a statistic from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the proportion of athletes who can become professional athletes is less than 10% (Choi & Kim, 2021). Career planning is the work-related competencies required for adolescences and adults to obtain employment. In the Malaysian context, the career development level and understanding pertaining to career planning is at a medium to low level (Lau, et al., 2018). At the same time, the academic performance of Malaysian student-athletes has

been consistently underperformed, indicating that they have limited opportunity to obtain stable careers after leaving school, therefore, a lot of former sports school students become fisherman, lorry drivers, factory workers and other heart-broken career prospects, hence, the career planning of student-athletes would be worthy of study (Mansor, et al., 2023).

Pursuing athletics as a career has been a dream for many, but the issue within athletics career is very short and very competitive, some sports like badminton, tennis, swimming, diving, and athletics are open to a limited number of persons, this led to the challenges of unemployment in youth. The unemployment in youth is a perennial issue, however, the unemployment among secondary school student-athletes issue is support in NEW Straits Times, the scenario of unemployment among graduates is a matter of gnawing concerns of education planners, there are about sixty-percent (60%) of the students unemployed after graduation, and the similar concerns furrowed to the student-athletes in Malaysia. In the same way, as mentioned adforehead, student-athlete are lack of supportive and caring in terms of their situation of post-retirement, this is because many of our former athletes faced financial distress because they were not provided with any significant or sustained assistance upon their retirement, after having represented the country for a long time (Sathasivam Sitheravellu, 2023; Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman, 2020, Surujlal, & Van Zyl, 2014). Moreover, a lot of former sports school students become heart-broken career prospects (Mansor, et al., 2018).

World-of-work is rooted in current thinking; hence, student-athletes need to be guide and clearly taught about their future in sport schools either individually and

collectively to build their future (Canzittu, 2020). For this we need counselling. The current state of athletic identity plays an important role in supporting the mental health and well-being of student-athletes, and plays a vital role in cultivating student-athletes' mental health literacy as well as awareness of the signs of mental illness amongst student-athletes (Purcell, et al., 2019). Moreover, besides to the role of athletic identity and mental health in influencing career planning (Berg, 2018; Knowles, et al., 2021), perceived social support happens to be a factor in influencing career planning too (Turan, et al., 2014; Gilstrap, 2016; Migunde, 2020). Therefore, the current research aims to propose a model that recognizes the impact of athletics identity, mental health and perceived social support on student-athletes' career planning in sports careers.

Thence, this is appearing to be an empirical gap in the prior research. There is a lack of rigorous research in the prior literature, similarly, theoretical gap also appears in the current study as the factors, such as student athletes' athletic identity, mental health and perceived social support and other hindrances remain unexplored towards career planning among student athletes (Wu, 2018), these seem to be important and worthy of investigation in the context of the Malaysia upper secondary sports school student-athletes' career planning in sports or professional careers.

An empirical investigation of these issues is important because these students need to be guided and clearly taught about their future in sports schools. Furthermore, previous researches mainly focused on the academic achievements of student athletes (Rankin, et al., 2016; Chuan, et al., 2013), dual careers (López-Flores, et al., 2021) and career development in general (August, 2018; Martin, 2018). In theoretical gap perspective, there need more research to understand the relationship between Social Cognitive

theory (Athletic Identity and Perceived Social Support), Cognitive Information Processing Theory (Mental Health) and Social Career Cognitive theory (Career and Tertiary Education Readiness Inventory (CaTERI)). So far, few researches have directly attempted to empirically evaluate the career planning of upper secondary school student-athletes (Miles, 2017).

As a matter of fact, previous research had been done pertaining to student-athletes. But, some of these sub-populations have not been explored and under researched. Therefore, in the context of career planning, upper secondary sports school student-athletes seem to be important and worthy of study. The investigation of this group is important because career planning ought to start at a young age and majority of the student-athletes expected to be professional athletes as they are blessed to be in sports schools and pursue their interest in school. However, getting a career in professional sports is not just a lofty goal, but also a lot like the odds of winning the lottery (Farmer, 2019). Therefore, student-athlete must be prepared for real or imagined boundaries so that they are enable to remain unruffled if they are facing failure or termination. Furthermore, previous research has focused primarily on collegiate, universities and tertiary level of student-athletes (Lally & Kerr, 2005; Tyrance, et al., 2013; Martin, 2018; August, 2020; Coffin, et al., 2021). Very little research has been done on sports upper secondary school student-athletes (Miles, 2017).

In conclusion, on the basis of reviewing previous studies, there are two research gaps, namely, the empirical gap and the theoretical gap. Research is needed to be evaluate and empirically verify student-athletes' career planning, because these selected talent students are ought to have clearer thoughts when formulating career plans, because it

would be unfair if they become drivers etc. Additionally, every effort must be taken to ensure the overall performance of these student-athletes. Therefore, not only the career planning, but also the relationship between their athletic identity, mental health and perceived social supports are worthy to find out based on the situation in Malaysia, especially the situation of the sports upper secondary school student-athletes' population, so that they have a backup when they failed to achieved what was expected of them.

1.3 Objective of the Study

Another glaring issue is the situation and conditions associated with athletes' mental health issues might potentially jeopardize the student athletes' sports performance (Bradley, et.al., 2019). Besides, if the issue of mental health status is not determined and address, the progress of the program can be disturbed and the targeted result may not be attainable. Another issue that needs to be emphasized is supports. It is a factor that affects the mental health of student-athletes (Graupensperger, et al., 2020), at the same time, supports play a role in the career plans of upper secondary school students as well as student-athletes of their support system (Turan, et al., 2014; Gilstrap, 2016; Migunde, 2020). Therefore, based on this previous study, there are several objectives to achieve, among others the study aspires;

1. To determine the status of athletic identity, mental health, perceived social support and career planning among of sports upper secondary school student-athletes.

2. To determine the relationship between athletic identity, mental health, perceived social support and career planning among of sports upper secondary school student-athletes.
3. To determine the role of mental health as mediator for athletic identity and perceived social support on career planning among sport upper secondary school student-athletes.
4. To develop a model to determine the relationships between athletics identity, mental health, perceived social support and career planning.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the status of athletic identity, mental health, perceived social support and career planning among upper secondary school student-athletes?
2. What is the correlation between athletic identity, mental health, perceived social support and career planning among upper secondary school student-athletes?
3. What is the role of mental health as mediator for athletic identity and perceived social support on career planning among sport upper secondary school student-athletes?
4. What is the model fitness value between athletic identity, mental health, perceived social support on career planning among upper secondary school student-athletes?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

Based on the research objectives, the research hypotheses are form, the current study will be applied alternative hypothesis. The purpose of using alternative hypotheses is because the researchers is trying to prove the claim is true (Moore, et al., 2013).

- H_{a1a}: There is a significant relationship between athletic identity and career adaptability among upper secondary sports school student -athletes.
- H_{a1b}: There is a significant relationship between athletic identity and career optimism among upper secondary sports school student-athletes.
- H_{a1c}: There is a significant relationship between athletic identity and career knowledge among upper secondary sports school student-athletes.
- H_{a1d}: There is a significant relationship between athletic identity and career and college readiness self-efficacy among upper secondary sports school student-athletes.
- H_{a1e}: There is a significant relationship between athletic identity and self-efficacy planning among upper secondary sports school student-athletes.
- H_{a2a}: There is a significant relationship between mental health status and career adaptability among upper secondary sports school student-athletes.
- H_{a2b}: There is a significant relationship between mental health status and career optimism among upper secondary sports school student-athletes.
- H_{a2c}: There is a significant relationship between mental health status and career knowledge among upper secondary sports school student-athletes.
- H_{a2d}: There is a significant relationship between mental health status and career and college readiness self-efficacy among upper secondary sports school student-athletes.
- H_{a2e}: There is a significant relationship between mental health status and self-efficacy planning among upper secondary sports school student-athletes.
- H_{a3a}: There is a significant relationship between perceived social support and career adaptability among upper secondary sports school student-athletes.

- H_{a3b}: There is a significant relationship between perceived social support and career optimism among upper secondary sports school student-athletes.
- H_{a3c}: There is a significant relationship between perceived social support and career knowledge among upper secondary sports school student-athletes.
- H_{a3d}: There is a significant relationship between perceived social support and career and college readiness self-efficacy among upper secondary sports school student-athletes.
- H_{a3e}: There is a significant relationship between perceived social support and self-efficacy planning among upper secondary sports school student-athletes.
- H_{a4a}: Mental health does mediate the relationship of athletic identity on career planning among upper secondary sports school student-athletes.
- H_{a4b}: Mental health does mediate the relationship of perceived social support on career planning among upper secondary sports school student-athletes.

1.6 Limitation and Scope

This study has its limitations in terms of purpose, scope, samples and locality, and the methodology of the study. The purpose of the study is to determine how the exogenous (independent) variables and endogenous (dependent) variable are related and connected to each other and, how they are related and connected to career planning among upper secondary sports school student-athletes. However, career planning is limited to only one scope of career counselling, that is comprise of career optimism, career adaptability, career knowledge, career and college readiness self-efficacy and self-efficacy planning. This study focuses on the issues of athlete's identity, mental

health, perceived social support and career planning among upper secondary sports school student-athletes who are active in sport in the selected schools. Each of the focus variable have various structures, however only several are selected to enable proper management and appropriateness of the data with the requirements of the study.

The study is also limited to data gathered from students in secondary schools from certain localities and researcher may not have the option to choose if the administrator of the schools refuses to take part in the study. The findings and discussion of the study are based on data obtained from the samples from the sports secondary schools involved. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to elementary student-athletes, and tertiary level students-athletes. And, this study is also limited to secondary schools under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education Malaysia and, other types of schools such as private schools and international schools are excluded. Another limitation is the research methodology employed in the study.

All findings and discussion will be based solely on data analysis appropriate to the chosen research methodology. If the same study is replicated with different methodologies, the findings may differ in some aspects, for instance, Ferrera, (2014), conducted qualitative research that collected data from students on a single university campus. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other student-athletes attending other universities. Additionally, if the study employed a different methodology, the results may differ due to the purpose of the study and the analytical procedures applied in the study, e.g., having case studies to support student-athletes in constructing careers related to their intentions, beliefs in their career paths and pathways related to empowerment (Faidley, 2022), therefore, qualitative methods will

produce results in the form of words rather than numbers to determine levels or relationships.

1.7 Significance of Study

The study is beneficial to various groups such as students, teachers, parents, counsellors, psychologist, sports organizers and sports administrator. The study can benefit students in terms of knowledge about career counselling, specifically career planning, and how sport is related to their athletic identity, mental health and perceived social support. They can become more aware of what to do in order to improve their performance in academic and sport. Based on the findings students can take personal steps to implement personal improvement program to enhance their strengths and improve their weaknesses in terms of athletic identity, mental health, perceived social support, career optimism, career adaptability, career knowledge, career and college readiness self-efficacy and self-efficacy planning.

Every athlete dream of moving onto the professional level and getting paid to play the game that they love, but in reality, a majority of the 450,000 NCAA student athletes will not continue onto the professional level (Grimit, 2014). Therefore, teachers and coaches would benefit from it because they would know how each variable influence students-athletes' life and performance. Understanding of student-athletes' athletic identity, mental health status and perceived social support would make teachers and coaches to be more understanding, compromising and less judgemental and less punitive when student-athletes misbehave in class or in the field, in addition, they could encourage the student-athlete or refer them to someone could help them (such as: counsellor). Understanding student-athletes' position and situation would lead to

the creation of amicable and conducive climate during class and training sessions for the betterment of everyone and sport aspiration of the nation.

Parents and community also benefit from the study. They would get knowledge and understanding about how adolescents struggle in academic and sport activities. The understanding should enable them to be more understanding and supportive so that adolescents are experiencing a more conducive and productive family support while pursuing the aspiration. The knowledge would also be beneficial to parents in terms of giving opinions and suggestions in relation to their sport activities. Quality, positive and encouraging interaction with openness and mutual respect definitely boost the enthusiasm of the student-athletes a great deal. If they have conducive positive climate at home the student-athletes definitely have less pressure and most likely would keep improving and perform better.

To those who are involved in managing student-athletes and at other levels too will get better understanding of the predicament the adolescents are facing. They may take positive steps as to improve their knowledge and skills in communication and interaction a motivation for example so that their intention does not hurt the emotion of the athletes. They too would be able to plan and adjust training schedule and intensity appropriately so that it would not pose uneasiness and burn out among students.

Last but not least, career skills are part of students 21st century skills (Kay,2009). Greater attention needed to the career planning among the athletes before they get unemployed, with an emphasis, we are not affording to doing injustice to these “special and talented minority” as this will discourage future aspiring athletes from taking up

sports. Therefore, this study would gain a better understanding to the relationship between athletic identity, mental health and perceived social support towards upper secondary school student athletes' career planning.

1.8 Definition of Terms

There are several concepts in this study that need to be given operational definition. The operational definition serves as guidance and reminder to readers about the meaning of the concepts in the study for it can be different from the meaning of the concept in normal situation. In other words, the meaning of the concept is specific and purposeful to the context of the study. This would enhance clarity and understanding on the part of the readers. The related concepts are sport and adolescence (student-athletes) career planning, athletic identity, mental health and perceived social support.

1.8.1 Student-Athletes

Student-athlete is a student dealing with their academic counterpart, at the same time, their striving to balance their life and their sporting activities (Gomez, et al., 2018). In addition, student-athlete is difference with a normal student in terms of graduation, where student-athlete graduation is representing the end of their formal sport careers (Petitpas, et al., 1996). In the current study, student-athletes represent young men and women in Form 4 and 5 high school sports schools who are currently taking on the challenges of being a good student as well as an athlete who performs well in athletic competitions. The criteria for selection of student-athletes are students registered in a Malaysian sports school, whether it is a national sports school or a state sports school.

1.8.2 Career Planning

Career planning serves as a helping hand in assisting client to understand about career and also provide information about the career activities and career guidance for direction, it is a process involving thinking and talking about career (Jouber & Crous, 2005). There are steps involving in career planning, which is first, understanding oneself, second, exploring potential career, and career decision making (Hizam, 2017).

In this research, career planning is present as student-athletes' career optimism, career adaptability, career knowledge, career and college readiness self-efficacy and self-efficacy planning needed to career ready upon upper secondary sports school life graduation. However, to measure career planning, researchers developed an instrument called the Career and Tertiary Education Readiness Inventory (CaTERI), and CaTERI has been adopted and adapted by researchers after careful selection among well-established career counselling instruments.

Career Optimism

Optimism is a character, and the character in career optimism is about concerning interested in careers and actively participating in career-related activities by allocating positive expectations and motivations (McIlveen, et al., 2013). According to the definition of Rottinghaus, et al., (2005), career optimism is defined as an individual's mentality of expecting the best possible outcomes pertained to his/her career planning.

At the same time, career optimism is also defined as an individual's capability in identify and emphasize the positive factors in future career development, as well as satisfaction in the implementation of career planning tasks. In the current research, career optimism is related to the optimism of secondary sports school athletes in

planning their sports career or professional career in the future based on Career Future Inventory (CFI)- Career Optimism construct.

Career Adaptability

Career adaptability is an individual's perception of his or her ability to cope with and benefit on change in the future, the degree of adaptation to new job responsibilities, and ability to recover when unforeseen events alter career plans (Rottinghaus, et al., 2005). Career adaptability is variable of interest, this is a skill serve to navigate an individual in various work responsibilities, as well as it is referring an individual's competencies in preparing themselves in any transitions over lifespan (Letawsky Shultz, 2017). In this research, Career adaptability referring to the adaptability of the upper secondary sports school student-athletes respond to any unforeseen events alter career plans in sport or in professional based on Career Future Inventory (CFI)- Career Adaptability construct.

Career Knowledge

Career planning is a complicated process. However, the knowledge of the career itself is a competency that applies a wide range of cognitive applications which required in the process. It also refers the understands and perceptions towards the job market and employment trends in the respective interest (Abdullah, et al., 2018; Rottinghaus, et al., 2005). Therefore, the focus of the career knowledge in the current research is to examine the level of understanding among upper secondary sports school student-athletes toward the careers market and trends of the latest interested careers based on Career Future Inventory (CFI)- Career Knowledge construct.

Career and College Readiness Self-Efficacy

In career planning, readiness is one of the keys in making successful planning (Mahmud, et al., 2020). While career and college readiness can be defined in numerous ways, the ultimate goal is the belief that one can excel in further education and have a meaningful career (Baker, et.al., 2017). As mention by American School Counselor Association, (2013) career planning defined as a result in students making connections between school situations and overall life experiences in order to acquire the relevant knowledge necessary for college and career choices (Leggett, 2019). For example, an upper secondary school student-athlete successful in reaching major championships, so the student-athletes will connect his life to continue in sports career. Otherwise, a student-athletes excel in achieve academic achievement, he/she might join professional career related field (Healy, et al., 2020). During the process, the hard work and diligence paid to the goals were highlighted to ensure that the student athletes can achieve the realization of future goals. (Gencer & Öztürk, 2018). Thus, the career and college readiness self-efficacy in the current research is to examine student-athletes' career and college readiness self-efficacy's basic understanding and knowledge in college and career situations, decision-making encompasses the ability to execute choices based on motivation to support future career or tertiary education readiness based on Career and College Readiness Self-Efficacy Inventory (CCRSI).

Self-Efficacy Planning

Self-efficacy planning is essential for getting people to prepare what can and should be done to achieve the big goal, or at least know what can be done. Planning is essential for student-athletes as they are struggle between sports (athletic) and academics over

the academic year (Healy, et al., 2020). Through their academic year, the time-stressed live requires proper planning in terms of learning study time and training to makes their practise effective and efficient. They planning to practice for various tests and trainings to support the need to attain grades that maintain eligibility while progressing toward timely graduation with a major (Kastler, 2021). The self-efficacy planning in the current study focuses on the planning of student-athletes in the future careers based on Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSE)- Planning construct.

1.8.3 Athletic Identity

Athletic Identity is an insight identity in a person with a level in perceiving oneself as an athlete with athletic role (Hilliard, et al., 2015). On top of that, athletics identity is a player's acknowledgement on self and acknowledgement from others, hence, level of dedication, involvement, value, and meaning of perceived athletic activity (Tušák, et al., 2005). In this research, athletic identity refers to students' perceived awareness of their sport ability, self-esteem, and their willingness to strive their capacity to perform their best for excellence in performance of their chosen sport and the instrument in measuring the athletic identity is Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS).

1.8.4 Mental Health

Mental health is a state if absence mental illness raises of self-awareness and identifies positive emotions or positive feelings under any stressful circumstance or pressure situation and this positive mind-set is playing important role in representing good mental health (Galderisi, et al., 2015). According to World Health Organization

(2006), mental health is related to an individual's mental also well-being and it is an immediate effect on physical health and behaviour. Over and above that, mental health is a state of mental well-being that equips people to learn well, work well, manage one-self and make plans for live and contribute to their communities (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). Mental health is therefore critical to individual, community and socioeconomic development. The definition of mental health in this study was based on the Mental Health Continuum Short Form (MHC-SF) instrument. Through MHC-SF, students' psychological well-being, social well-being and emotional well-being are related to and positively or negatively affected by student-athletes' athletic training and competition.

Psychological Well-Being

According to Burns, (2017), psychological well-being refers to the level of confidence in an individual's ability to interact with others and to function positively within the individual for personal development. It is a very core feature of mental health, and it is defined as personal enjoyment, pleasure, "*eudaimonic*" (meaning and fulfillment), coping and resilience. However, psychological well-being in the current study refers to "*eudaimonic*", the meaning and fulfillment among the student-athletes' psychological well-being that includes self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, personal growth, autonomy and purpose in life. These items were selected as the most prototypical items representing the constructed definition for psychological well-being based from the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF).

Social Well-Being

Social well-being is related to an individuals' social interaction as well as appraisal of one's social relationships with others, including with institutions and communities (Cicognani, 2014). Social well-being also defined as a sense of belonging and social inclusion in relation to with one's physical and psychological, academic performance and personal growth (Moliner, et al., 2021). In the current study, social well-being refers to the sense of well-being that includes social contribution, social integration, social actualization, social acceptance and social cohesion among Malaysian upper secondary school student-athletes, these items were selected based on the Mental Health Continuum- Short Form (MHC-SF) as the most representative items for constructing definitions for social well-being as applied in the current study.

Emotional well-being

Emotional well-being has been interpreted as an affective element that focusing on positive emotions, for instance happiness and positive appraisals of life satisfaction (Lamers, et al., 2012). Meanwhile, emotional well-being is also often defined as either positive and negative everyday feelings, affections and emotion experiences (Kahneman & Deaton 2010). In the current study, the emotional well-being was defined as "*hedonic*" that measuring happiness, interested in life, and satisfaction among Malaysian upper secondary sports school student-athletes, and these items were selected as the most typical items representing emotionally constructed definitions based on the Mental Health Continuum- Short Form (MHC-SF).

1.8.5 Perceived Social Support

Social support refers to an interaction between an individuals and others, which is a process of providing or exchanging resources (such as being care, respected and loved) by other people (Gabert-Quillen, et al., 2011). Social support could be in the form of visible (for instance: letter, gift, or foods) or invisible (for instance: such as encouragement, emotional support and effective coping schemes) support offered by one and other in a relationship, such as husband and wife, mother and son, father and daughter, etc, when necessary (Zee & Bolger, 2019; Girmé, et. al., 2018). In this study, perceived social support is measure through Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), based on MSPSS the awareness and beliefs that the students feel that they have the support of significant others (teachers, coaches), family members, friends (peers) and in their effort to excel in their chosen sport.

Significant Others Supports

Some research has identified significant others are including partners, family members, close friends or “special person” (such as spouses or wooer) (Prezza et al., 2002). However, in the current study, significant others support known as “special person” is measuring the Malaysian upper secondary school student-athletes’ coaches and teachers and the supportiveness is based on Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) result.

Family Supports

Family supports include both extended family members and immediate family members, but some research defined as focus on family members within the same

residence (Kelley, et al., 2021). However, in the current study, family support was measured by applying the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) to Malaysian upper secondary school student-athletes' immediate family members such as father, mothers and siblings in the family.

Friends Supports

According to Salimi & Bozorgpour, (2012), social support from friends is refers to social relationships in which the individual was part of a group of people known as friend who share common interests and activities. However, in the current study, friend support was measured by applying the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) regarding to the Malaysian upper secondary school student-athletes' classmates, teammates and other peers who shared the common interested in sports.

1.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter explains the backgrounds of the study. Among others this chapter provides the background of the core concepts focused in the study, such as student-athletes, career planning, athletic identity, mental health and perceived social support. At the same time, this chapter also presents the objectives and research questions, scope and limitation, significance of study and operational definition of related concepts. The next chapter presents the literature and research articles that become the basis foundation and related to the issues of the study.

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