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**Student-athletes' well-being: the role of willingness to share knowledge, openness to experience, and perceptions of coaching effectiveness**

*Abstract*

Student-athletes simultaneously face stressors in sport and education, which poses a risk to their psychological well-being. Previous work has shown that variables such as knowledge sharing and openness to experience are positively correlated with subjective well-being. The present cross-sectional study investigated how student-athletes' openness to experience and participation in knowledge sharing affect their well-being, and whether respondents' perceived coaching effectiveness may influence this relationship. To test the proposed statistical model, an online self-diagnostic survey was conducted among 412 student-athletes from nine cities in Kazakhstan. Regression analysis confirmed: (1) openness to experience positively influences self-diagnosed knowledge sharing activity with peers ( $p < 0.05$ ); (2) openness to experience is associated with higher subjective well-being score of student-athletes ( $p < 0.05$ ); (3) knowledge sharing predicts well-being ( $p < 0.05$ ); (4) knowledge sharing mediates the relationship between openness to experience and well-being ( $p < 0.05$ ); (5) subjective coaching effectiveness does not moderate the relationship between openness to experience and knowledge sharing ( $p > 0.05$ ). For the Eurasian population, the study is unique. The results emphasize the need for universities to encourage knowledge sharing among students involved in professional sport. However, the external factor of coach quality apparently cannot convert young athletes' willingness to learn new things into their willingness to share knowledge. Subsequent replications of the study are particularly promising when extending the model with additional personality traits of the participants.

**Key words:** mediation analysis, moderation analysis, professional sport, psychometrics, psychological well-being.

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### **Білім алушы-спортшылардың әл-ауқаты: білім алмасуға дайындықтың, тәжірибеге ашықтықтың және жаттықтырушылық жұмыстың тиімділігін қабылдаудың рөлі**

#### *Аңдатпа*

Білім алушы-спортшылар бір уақытта спортта және білім беруде стресстерге тап болады, бұл олардың психологиялық әл-ауқатына қауіп төндіреді. Алдыңғы жұмыстар білім алмасу және тәжірибеге ашықтық сияқты айнымалылар субъективті әл-ауқатпен оң байланысты екенін көрсетті. Осы кросс-секциялық зерттеу білім алушы-спортшылардың тәжірибеге ашықтығы және олардың білім алмасуға қатысуы олардың әл-ауқатына қалай әсер ететінін және респонденттер бағалайтын жаттықтырушылық жұмыстың тиімділігіне осы байланысқа әсер ете алатынын зерттеді. Ұсынылған статистикалық модельді тексеру үшін Қазақстанның тоғыз қаласынан 412 білім алушы-спортшы арасында онлайн өзін-өзі диагностикалау жүргізілді. Регрессиялық талдау мынаны растады: (1) тәжірибеге ашықтық өзін-өзі диагностикалайтын құрдастарымен білім алмасу белсенділігіне оң әсер етеді ( $p < 0,05$ ); (2) тәжірибеге ашықтық білім алушы-спортшылардың субъективті әл-ауқатының жоғары көрсеткішімен байланысты ( $p < 0,05$ ); (3) білім алмасу әл-ауқатты болжайды ( $p < 0,05$ ); (4) білім алмасу тәжірибеге ашықтық пен әл-ауқат арасындағы байланысты делдал етеді ( $p < 0,05$ ); (5) жаттықтырушылық жұмыстың субъективті тиімділігі тәжірибеге ашықтық пен білім алмасу арасындағы байланысты модерацияламайды ( $p > 0,05$ ). Еуразиялық контингент үшін зерттеу бірегей болып табылады. Нәтижелер университеттер үшін кәсіби спортқа қатысатын білім алушы білімімен алмасуды ынталандыру қажеттілігін көрсетеді. Алайда, жаттықтырушының жұмыс сапасының сыртқы факторы жас спортшылардың жаңа нәрсеге дайындығын біліммен бөлісуге деген ұмтылысына айналдыра алмайды. Зерттеудің кейінгі репликациялары модельді қатысушылардың қосымша жеке қасиеттерімен кеңейту кезінде әсіресе перспективалы болып табылады.

**Түйін сөздер:** медиациялық талдау, мотивациялық талдау, кәсіби спорт, психометрия, психологиялық әл-ауқат.

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### **Благополучие студентов-спортсменов: роль готовности к обмену знаниями, открытости опыту и восприятия эффективности тренерской работы**

#### *Аннотация*

Студенты-спортсмены одновременно сталкиваются со стрессорами в спорте и в образовании, что представляет риск для их психологического благополучия. Предыдущие работы показали, что такие переменные, как обмен знаниями и открытость опыту, положительно коррелируют с субъективным благополучием. В настоящем кросс-секционном исследовании изучалось, как открытость студентов-спортсменов к опыту и их участие в обмене знаниями влияют на их благополучие, и может ли влиять на эту связь оцениваемая респондентами эффективность тренерской работы. Для проверки предложенной статистической модели была проведена онлайн самодиагностика среди 412 студентов-спортсменов из девяти городов Казахстана. Регрессионный анализ подтвердил: (1) открытость опыту положительно воздействует на самодиагностируемую активность обмена знаниями со сверстниками ( $p < 0,05$ ); (2) открытость опыту связана с более высоким показателем

субъективного благополучия студентов-спортсменов ( $p < 0,05$ ); (3) обмен знаниями предсказывает благополучие ( $p < 0,05$ ); (4) обмен знаниями опосредует взаимосвязь между открытостью опыту и благополучием ( $p < 0,05$ ); (5) субъективная эффективность тренерской работы не модулирует взаимосвязь между открытостью опыту и обменом знаниями ( $p > 0,05$ ). Для евразийского контингента исследование является уникальным. Результаты подчёркивают необходимость для университетов стимулировать к обмену знаниями студентов, вовлечённых в профессиональный спорт. Однако внешний фактор качества работы тренера, видимо, не может конвертировать готовность молодых спортсменов к новому в их желание делиться знаниями. Последующие репликации исследования особенно перспективны при расширении модели дополнительными личностными чертами участников.

**Ключевые слова:** медиационный анализ, модерационный анализ, профессиональный спорт, психометрия, психологическое благополучие.

**Introduction** By combining academic employment with high intensity training, student-athletes represent a prospect for studying psychological well-being. Athletes' well-being is of paramount importance as it significantly affects their overall health and performance and contributes to their thriving [1]. Taking advantage of the privileges afforded by academic institutions, student-athletes must be able to successfully balance athletic and academic achievement to build a successful career in the future [2]. Representing their university in athletic competition, while still attending classes and maintaining academic performance, is a demanding workload that requires intensive mental preparation and practice.

Unlike typical students, athletes often face unique challenges associated with an intense daily routine, including physical (overtraining syndrome and injury risks, fatigue, decreased performance) and mental health issues (stress, burnout) [3, 4]. The mentioned stressors, including worries about their health and financial situation, are detrimental to the well-being of student-athletes [5]. In addition, some student-athletes have poor academic preparation and are not eager to learn, which, combined with busy schedules and reduced motivation to study, can significantly reduce their psychological well-being (e.g., frustration, lack of purpose, and poor academic performance) [6]. The danger is that long-term negative emotions can lead to serious mental illness, including cognitive dysfunction.

In view of the above, a cross-sectional study aimed at improving the well-being of student-athletes seems relevant. It is important to understand the factors that help students improve their well-being. The purpose of the study is to explore how student-athletes' openness to experience and participation in knowledge sharing affects their well-being, and whether respondents' perceived coaching effectiveness may influence this relationship.

For students involved in sport who have just entered university, it is important to learn how to interact with unfamiliar actors (peers and coaches) in order to achieve effective learning and to overcome increasing stress. Moreover, the quality of interaction is often determined by students' personality traits, one of which is openness to new experiences, which motivates learners to share acquired knowledge with peers, and to debate in controversial issues in order to fill learning gaps [7]. Personality traits (including neuroticism, extraversion, benevolence, conscientiousness, and openness to new experiences), are good demonstrators of human behavioral patterns, due to which they are widely used to interpret athletes' performance [8]. Openness to new experiences, which we included in the study as one of the determinants, is a widely known proven significant predictor of subjective psychological well-being [9].

Student-athletes who are more open to experience have been shown to be more willing to exchange and share knowledge with peers to enhance psychological well-being [10]. Researchers have noted that student-athletes need critical knowledge gained through interactions with peers and coaches [6]. In order to learn how to deal with academic issues and succeed in academic exams, students who spend most of their time in training need to interact with peers (especially those who are not involved in sports). Peer interaction can occur through knowledge sharing, i.e., sharing

information, skills, and experiences among peers (including athletes and non-athletes) [11]. Athletes who are willing to learn new things are motivated to share knowledge with peers in exchange for necessary information (e.g., how to avoid injuries during training) that helps to cope with stressors that affect psychological well-being [7].

Student-athletes may also need to learn from professionals, including coaches, to develop communication and collaboration skills, gain experience in problem solving, and learn practical strategies to enhance athletic performance [8]. For many athletes, the coach is a key social support figure [1]. Researchers have concluded that it is the athletes' subjective perception of the coach's effectiveness that is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of coaching, which can shape student-athletes' motivation and behavior related to their psychological well-being [12]. In addition, the development of trusting relationships and social adaptation of athletes contributes to the formation of a favorable atmosphere, increasing psychological safety and reducing stress [13].

This cross-sectional study makes a meaningful contribution to the theoretical and practical aspects of sport education psychology. From a theoretical perspective, it expands the understanding of student-athletes' well-being factors by demonstrating the significance of personality traits and communicative practices. In contrast to previous studies that focused mainly on the role of external factors (coaching support, institutional environment), this paper emphasizes the importance of the subject position of student-athletes themselves. From a practical point of view, the findings can serve as a basis for developing psychological interventions aimed at developing openness to experience and knowledge sharing skills in student-athletes. The identified psychological mechanisms indicate the need to create an educational environment that stimulates personal growth and active interaction between the participants of educational and training processes.

**Research methodology** According to the purpose of the study, the following research questions were formulated: (1) is openness to experience related to a measure of student-athletes' subjective well-being; (2) how does student-athletes' knowledge sharing with peers affect their self-diagnosed psychological well-being; and (3) does student-athletes' perceived coaching effectiveness moderate the relationship between their openness to experience and knowledge sharing?

It is hypothesized that student-athletes' openness to experience and participation in knowledge sharing are positively related to their well-being. Perceived coaching effectiveness is also expected to moderate these relationships, reinforcing the positive effects of openness to experience and knowledge sharing on well-being with higher coach evaluations. In the cross-sectional study, 412 student-athletes from nine cities in Kazakhstan voluntarily participated and completed an online survey on the Google Forms platform to accomplish the purpose of the current work.

The survey materials were preliminarily studied by experts from the teaching staff of the Academy of Physical Education and Mass Sports (Astana), as well as tested on a group of students to clarify the clarity of wording and to exclude irrelevant questions. Translation and adaptation of the materials were carried out by researchers from among the authors of the article, as well as a professional translator involved in the work. Thus, the final questionnaire covered 4 determinants: (1) student-athletes' well-being, (2) their openness to experience, (3) knowledge sharing with peers, and (4) perceived effectiveness of coaching. A 5-point Likert scale was used to assess the results of each construct. Our calculated Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient for the final questionnaire was 0.86, indicating its high structural reliability.

Psychological well-being was measured using the 12-item Student Athlete Well-being Framework (SAWBF) questionnaire [14], adapted from Zhunussova et al. (2025) [15]. Respondents were asked to rate their well-being since their enrollment in higher education. Student-athletes ranked agreement with each statement on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (all the time).

Openness to new experiences was measured using a 6-item questionnaire based on the NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) questionnaire adapted from Dong & Ni (2020) [16]. It assessed how much students enjoy immersing themselves in a new environment, developing sports skills, taking new classes, and how interested they are in their academic learning. Responses were rated from 1 (dislike) to 5 (very much like).

Knowledge sharing with peers was assessed using the 6-item Openness to Experience & Knowledge Sharing Scale questionnaire presented in Ni & Feng (2023) [7]. The assessment tool was used to demonstrate student-athletes' willingness to share their experience or knowledge with their environment. Responses were scored from 1 (very rarely) to 5 (very often).

Student-athletes' perceptions of coach effectiveness were measured using an adapted version of the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q) adapted from Coussens et al. (2025) [1]. The questionnaire included 11 items comprising the closeness, commitment, and complementarity subscales. The questions began with the wording “If necessary, to what extent does your head coach...”. Responses were rated from 1 (coach will not do this) to 5 (coach will do this to the fullest extent).

Preliminary evaluation of the collected data included calculation of arithmetic mean values and standard deviations. Assessment of the interrelatedness of the variables included Spearman correlation analysis. A regression model was constructed including both direct effects and moderation and mediation analyses using the bootstrap method. All analytic algorithms were performed in R 4.5.0. Coefficients in all criteria were considered statistically significant in the case of a p value less than 0.05.

**Results and discussion** Descriptive statistics for the measured indicators along with correlation coefficients are presented in Table 1. Judging by the distances between the mean and the range of standard deviations, the data set can be characterized as relatively homogeneous. The coaching perceptions indicator had virtually no correlations with the other variables. Moderate correlations were observed for the other relationships.

Table 1 Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ), standard deviations ( $\sigma$ ) and correlation matrix (n = 412)

| Variable                          | $\bar{x} \pm \sigma$ | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4 |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| 1. Openness to experience         | 3.11 $\pm$ 0.67      | —     |       |       |   |
| 2. Coaching                       | 3.68 $\pm$ 0.75      | -0.02 | —     |       |   |
| 3. Willingness to share knowledge | 2.55 $\pm$ 0.47      | 0.47* | 0.08  | —     |   |
| 4. Well-being                     | 3.37 $\pm$ 0.56      | 0.47* | -0.04 | 0.42* | — |

Note: \* variables are correlated at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

The moderation analysis refuted the moderating role of the subjective measure of coach performance in the association between openness to gain experience and willingness to share knowledge. This is confirmed by the insignificant contribution of the combination of variables ( $p = 0.626$ ), as well as by the nature of the graph in Figure 1, where the slopes of the lines are almost parallel. At the same time, the main effect of openness to experience was statistically significant ( $p = 0.001$ ), and the explanatory power of the model, estimated through  $R^2$ , was 0.227. This indicates a moderate share of the explained variance of the variable “willingness to share knowledge”.

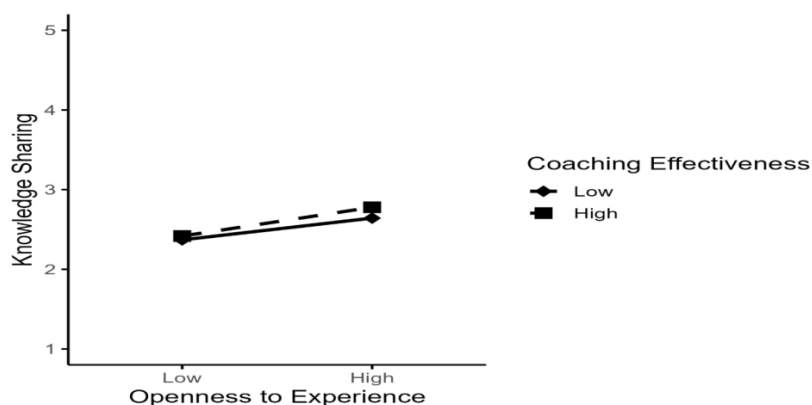


Fig. 1. - Slopegraph: results of the moderation analysis Unit: points

Table 2 presents a statistical summary of all effects included in the model. Openness to experience and willingness to share knowledge made comparable contributions to respondents' self-diagnosed psychological well-being. Thus, the effect of openness on well-being was direct and significant ( $p = 0.001$ ), while the mediating effect through willingness to share knowledge also reached significance given the mediator's contribution ( $p = 0.001$ ). The coaching perceptions indicator, meanwhile, had no statistically significant direct or moderating influence.

Table 2

Results of testing the hypothesized interrelationship model ( $n = 412$ )

| Predictor \ Function                          | Willingness to share knowledge |       |        |       | Well-being |       |       |       |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------|--------|-------|------------|-------|-------|-------|
|                                               | $\beta$                        | CO    | t      | p     | $\beta$    | CO    | t     | p     |
| Openness to experience                        | 0.262                          | 0.144 | 1.819  | 0.070 | 0.292      | 0.040 | 7.363 | 0.001 |
| Coaching work                                 | -0.006                         | 0.126 | -0.051 | 0.960 | —          | —     | —     | —     |
| Openness to experience $\times$ Coaching work | 0.019                          | 0.039 | 0.488  | 0.626 | —          | —     | —     | —     |
| Willingness to share knowledge                | —                              | —     | —      | —     | 0.304      | 0.056 | 5.388 | 0.001 |

Note:  $\beta$  = standardized regression coefficient; CO = standard error.

The pooled effects are visualized in Figure 2. As in Table 2, standardized coefficients are displayed.

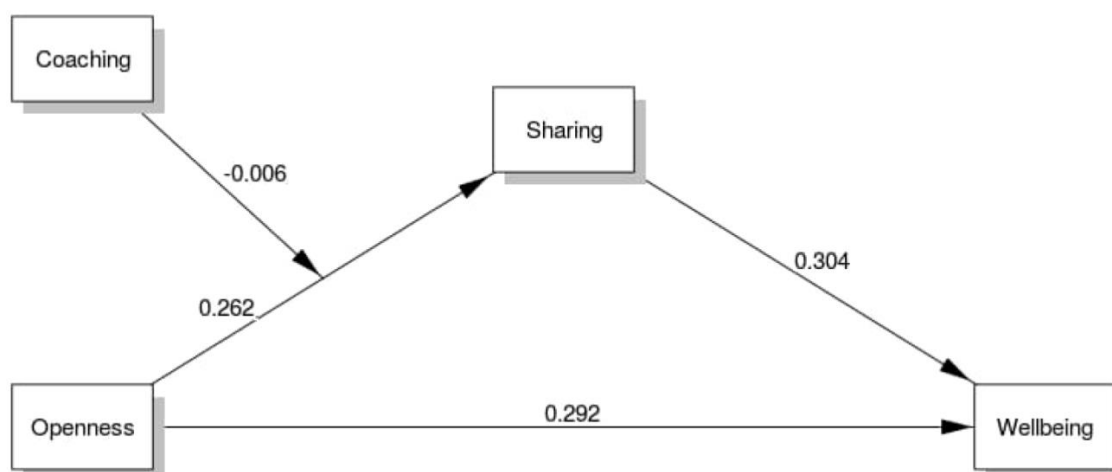


Fig. 2. - Structural model of interaction of variables

In summary, the present study was designed to examine the relationships between openness to experience, willingness to share knowledge, perceived coaching effectiveness, and student-athletes' well-being. The results demonstrate that openness to experience and willingness to share knowledge are significant predictors of student-athletes' well-being, whereas subjective perceptions of coaching effectiveness did not show the expected moderating effect.

We believe that the mechanisms underlying the discovered relationships can be explained from several theoretical positions. Openness to new experiences, being one of the Big Five personality traits, reflects an individual's propensity to explore new ideas, values, and emotions. For student-athletes, this can manifest itself in a willingness to learn new training techniques, to study academic disciplines with interest, and to adapt to the changing conditions of athletic and academic life. The process of exploratory activity and adaptation, in turn, contributes to personal growth and development, which, according to theories of self-determination, is an important component of psychological well-being.

Moreover, it is known that openness to experience as a personal characteristic contributes to a more flexible response to stressful situations and adaptation to new conditions of sports and academic

activities [16, 17]. In this regard, it can be assumed that student-athletes with a high level of openness to experience probably perceive difficulties and challenges not as a threat, but as an opportunity for growth and self-development, which directly affects their psychological well-being.

Willingness to share knowledge, in turn, can act as a mediator, as active interaction with peers and the sharing of personal experiences not only strengthens social ties but also enhances one's own understanding of the material or skill. In the context of college sports, knowledge sharing may include discussing training strategies, solving academic problems together, or providing emotional support, which reinforces the positive effects of openness to experience. Additionally, the willingness to share knowledge can presumably create a sense of belonging to the student body, increase self-esteem through the realization of one's usefulness to others, and foster a supportive environment, all of which are correlated with increased well-being. Consequently, the process of knowledge sharing not only promotes the accumulation of practical skills, but also creates an atmosphere of collegiality and mutual support, which is especially important in the high-stress environments experienced by student-athletes [18].

The lack of a significant moderating effect of perceptions of coaching may indicate that student-athletes' personal characteristics and own activity play a more significant role in shaping their well-being than external factors related to coaching influence, especially if the latter are not perceived as a key source of support or development, which is consistent with modern concepts of psychological well-being emphasizing the importance of internal personality resources. In a similar study, a similar result was obtained indicating that the coach-athlete relationship was associated with a significant indirect influence on psychological well-being through receiving coach support, but not subjectively perceived coach support [1].

Based on the results obtained, a number of practical recommendations can be formulated for psychologists, coaches and administrators of educational institutions:

1. Developing openness to experience in student-athletes can be accomplished by creating a variety of training and educational situations that require flexibility and creativity. Rotating training objectives, interdisciplinary projects, and a variety of athletic and academic activities can facilitate this. Educational institutions can implement training programs that encourage curiosity, exploration and a willingness to take on new challenges, creating an environment where mistakes are accepted as part of the learning process.

2. A culture of knowledge sharing can be fostered through structured discussions, mentoring programs where more experienced athletes share knowledge with newcomers, and collaborative projects between student-athletes from different courses and majors, as well as encouraging open group communication. Platforms and opportunities should be created for student-athletes to actively share their experiences. Creating a culture where knowledge sharing is valued and encouraged can greatly enhance psychological well-being. It is wise to set aside time within the training process for reflection and mutual learning.

3. Although perceptions of coaching have not shown a direct impact on well-being, coaches can indirectly promote openness to experience and knowledge sharing through creating a supportive and stimulating environment, while it is important to focus on building trusting relationships with mentees. A coaching approach that encourages student-athletes' autonomy and initiative is recommended.

4. Psychological support for student-athletes should include not only work with stress and emotional burnout, but also the development of personal resources, in particular, openness to experience and communication skills that promote effective knowledge sharing.

5. Educational programs for student-athletes can be supplemented with courses to develop "soft skills" such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking, including the ability to learn from others, share experiences, and integrate new knowledge into one's college life.

6. It is recommended that university administrations create infrastructure for informal knowledge exchange - spaces for communication, online platforms, regular events that bring together student-athletes from different disciplines and levels of training.

**Conclusion** The results of the current cross-sectional study reveal psychological mechanisms for shaping student-athletes' well-being. In particular, they point to the key role of personal openness to experience, which not only directly affects well-being, but also acts through increased willingness to share knowledge, creating a double positive effect. It also becomes evident that student-athletes' well-being is largely determined by their own engagement in building social and educational interactions, and not only by external factors such as coaching influence. We obtained practical evidence that the psychological well-being of student-athletes is largely determined by their personality characteristics and communicative practices. The model of the relationship between openness to experience, readiness to share knowledge, and well-being that we have proposed and tested represents a new perspective on the problems of psychological adaptation in the context of combining sports and academic activities. Of particular value is the discovery of the mediating role of willingness to share knowledge in the relationship between openness to experience and well-being. This mechanism has not been previously considered in the context of sport education psychology, which opens new perspectives for theoretical understanding and practical application. The conducted research allows us to rethink traditional approaches to psychological support of student-athletes, shifting the focus from external support factors to the development of internal personal resources and the formation of productive strategies of social interaction. In the conditions of high requirements for modern student-athletes, it is personal flexibility, readiness for new experience and active knowledge sharing that can become the key factors of successful adaptation and psychological prosperity. Delving deeper into the academic underpinning of the mechanisms, it can be hypothesized that openness to experience promotes the development of cognitive flexibility and adaptability, qualities critical for athletes who are constantly faced with new challenges, whether it be learning new tactics, adapting to different opponents, or overcoming academic difficulties. This flexibility allows them to more effectively cope with the stress and uncertainty inevitable in a student athlete's life, which directly impacts their psychological well-being. The relationship between openness and knowledge sharing is also logical: people who are more open to new things tend to be more interested in learning and development, which in turn motivates them to share their discoveries and experiences with others. This process not only enriches their own understanding, but also strengthens social ties, creating a kind of "feedback loop" where openness feeds sharing, and sharing in turn can stimulate further openness and curiosity. The lack of a significant impact of perceived effectiveness of coaching may seem surprising, but can be interpreted through the lens of the age and developmental stage of the respondents. Students in the transition to adulthood often form stronger peer connections and begin to rely more on their own internal resources and social environment than solely on authority figures such as coaches. This is not to say that the role of the coach is insignificant, but its impact on well-being may be more indirect, for example through creating a positive team environment that promotes knowledge sharing and social support. Further research could examine the mediating influence of coaches through team dynamics. The results of this study are of interest not only to psychologists and sports professionals, but also to a wide range of people interested in creating optimal conditions for the development of young people combining educational and sports activities. Using the knowledge gained, we can more effectively unlock the potential of student-athletes, contributing to their psychological well-being and success in various spheres of activity.

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