



The Effectiveness of a Structured Sports Activity Program in Reducing Psychological Stress and Its Role in Mitigating Burnout Among Dormitory Students at Anbar University

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Abstract: This study aimed to identify the effectiveness of a program based on structured sports activity in reducing psychological stress and its role in mitigating burnout among dormitory students at the University of Anbar, as well as analyzing the role that psychological stress plays in explaining the relationship between structured sports activity and burnout. The study was based on the hypothesis that the effect of sports activity is not limited to reducing burnout directly, but rather extends to an indirect effect through reducing psychological stress, as it is one of the main factors causing burnout. The researcher adopted the experimental approach using a pretest-posttest equivalent groups design (experimental and control). The study sample consisted of 25 students who were distributed into two groups: an experimental group that underwent the structured sports activity program, and a control group that did not undergo any intervention. The application of the program lasted for 7 weeks with two sessions per week, and included structured sports activities of an interactive nature aimed at (reducing psychological stress, improving emotion regulation, enhancing psychological balance). The study utilized a psychological stress scale and a burnout scale. The results showed statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in favor of the experimental group in the reduction of the level of psychological stress and burnout, and these results emphasize the importance of employing structured sports programs within psychological support strategies in the university environment, especially among dormitory students, due to their effective role in reducing psychological stress as a primary source of burnout, thereby limiting its manifestations and enhancing general mental health

Keywords: Structured Sports Activity Program, Psychological Stress, Burnout

Introduction

Psychological stress is considered one of the phenomena affecting an individual's mental health that they may be exposed to, which impacts their holistic health; repeated exposure to it constitutes a negative effect on the individual's feelings that may reach mental exhaustion and psychological and physical fatigue, and stressful situations differ according to the personality characterizing the individual and the psychological and behavioral structure characterizing some (Arab & Kamil, 2009). The modern university environment is witnessing noticeable transformations in the nature of the challenges faced by students,

particularly those residing in dormitories, where students are exposed to academic pressures along with the requirements of social and environmental adaptation, in light of being away from direct family support and relying on oneself in managing daily life affairs. It is in human nature to be affected by life situations and to interact with them through various emotions (such as joy, love, fear, sadness... etc.), and there is no doubt that suffering from stress, whether psychological, social, or economic, has a profound impact on an individual's life.

This overlap has contributed to the emergence of a set of negative psychological indicators, including burnout as a complex condition manifested in emotional exhaustion, lack of motivation, and a weak sense of accomplishment, which may directly reflect on the level of psychological adjustment and academic achievement. In light of these situations, caring for the mental health of students is no longer a secondary option but an urgent necessity that compels educational institutions to adopt modern and effective strategies that contribute to enhancing psychological balance and limiting the negative effects of psychological stress to which students are exposed. Structured sports activity is considered one of these strategies that has begun to receive increasing attention in modern literature, as sports activity is not limited to improving physical aspects only, but extends to include an impact on the emotional and cognitive state of the individual, through the structured environment it provides that helps discharge tension, regulate emotions, and enhance positive social interaction.

Al-Meligi (2000) indicates that "most developed countries make organized efforts to combat psychological and mental disorders and moral deviations due to their destructive effects that threaten humanity, and hence the importance of creating a generation of normal, cheerful youth embracing life, effective producers in their society, and capable of self-actualization and solving their problems; these are all necessary traits to support the edifice of a civilized society" (Al-Meligi, 2000). From a contemporary perspective, scientific research in the field of psychology tends towards understanding the psychological mechanisms that explain how different activities affect psychological indicators, where psychological stress has emerged as a variable reflecting the magnitude of the challenges an individual faces and the extent of their ability to cope with them. The literature indicates that continuous exposure to high levels of psychological stress leads to the depletion of the individual's psychological and emotional resources, which increases the likelihood of the emergence of burnout.

Burnout is considered "a phenomenon linked to the concept of diseases of civilization that afflict many through multiple psychological crises resulting primarily from the psychological pressures that a human faces, including work pressures that lead to a state of exhaustion as a result of the continuous increase in burdens and demands placed on the individual's shoulders and their inability to bear them, especially when ambitions do not match the actual reality they can actually achieve, as burnout is a reaction to accumulated pressures with a negative impact on the individual" (Saleh, 2021). Helmy (2013) indicates that psychological stress represents one of the fundamental variables in psychology, as it is related to the individual's ability to cope with the demands of life and various challenges, and that high levels of it lead to a disruption of psychological and emotional balance, which reflects negatively on the individual's mental health and their ability to adapt, whereas

controlling or reducing it contributes to enhancing psychological stability and preventing disorders (Helmy, 2013).

The importance of this research lies in building a structured sports activity program aimed at reducing psychological stress among dormitory students at the University of Anbar, and subsequently analyzing how this stress contributes to explaining the effect of sports activity in reducing burnout. This would contribute to providing an integrated scientific conceptualization about the mechanisms of the psychological impact of sports activity, thereby supporting its employment as an effective applied strategy within counseling and psychological support programs in the university environment.

Research Problem

The university stage is considered one of the critical stages in students' lives, due to the academic requirements and psychological and social challenges it entails that necessitate a high degree of adaptation. Dormitory students face, by virtue of the nature of their residency and the organization of their daily lives, a number of psychological pressures related to time management, academic commitments, and adapting to the university environment, which may lead to the depletion of their psychological energies and the appearance of burnout indicators, such as emotional exhaustion, a decline in motivation, and a feeling of low competence. In this context, structured sports activity emerges as one of the scientific methods that can contribute to supporting the mental health of students, through its role in improving emotional balance and alleviating the severity of psychological stress. However, the effectiveness of this activity is not limited to its direct impact in reducing burnout, but is assumed to be achieved indirectly through reducing levels of psychological stress, which represents one of the main factors associated with the emergence of burnout. Accordingly, the research problem is determined in the following question: What is the effectiveness of a structured sports activity program in reducing psychological stress among dormitory students at the University of Anbar, and what is the role of this stress in reducing burnout as a mediating variable in this relationship?

Research Objectives

1. Identifying the effectiveness of the structured sports activity program in reducing the level of psychological stress and limiting burnout among dormitory students at the University of Anbar.
2. Revealing the differences in the level of burnout and psychological stress between the experimental and control groups in the post-measurement.
3. Analyzing the correlational relationship between psychological stress and burnout among dormitory students.

Research Hypotheses

1. There are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements of the experimental group in psychological stress and the level of burnout in favor of the post-measurement.

2. There are statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups in the post-measurement in the level of burnout in favor of the experimental group.
3. There are statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups in the post-measurement in the level of stress in favor of the experimental group.
4. There is a statistically significant inverse correlational relationship between psychological stress and burnout.

Definition of Terms

1. Psychological Stress: "It is an internal effect created by a state of psychological and sexual imbalance within the individual and is consistent with factors arising from the environment surrounding the individual, such as anxiety, anger, and feelings of depression, whether the environment is familial or a general social environment" (Jaafar, 1999).
2. Burnout: "A psychological state characterized by a set of negative traits such as tension, instability, and a tendency towards isolation, as well as negative attitudes towards work and colleagues" (Al-Zahrani, 2008).

Methodology

The researcher utilized the experimental approach with a pretest-posttest equivalent groups design (experimental and control), considering it the most appropriate methodology to achieve the research objectives through the procedures adopted by the researcher in implementing his research experiment (Mohammed Hammood et al., 2025; Mohammed et al., 2025; Omar et al., 2025).

Research Population and Sample

The research population included students from certain colleges residing in the dormitories at the University of Anbar, totaling 166 students, representing three different colleges, which are: (College of Engineering), (College of Science), and (College of Islamic Sciences); the research sample consisted of 30 students, representing a percentage of (18.07%). They were selected using a randomized method.

Equipment, Tools, and Data Collection Means:

- Lenovo laptop.
- Keno handheld calculator.
- Data collection and recording forms.
- Psychological Stress Scale, Appendix (1).
- Burnout Scale, Appendix (2).
- Structured Sports Activity Program, Appendix (3).
- Arabic and foreign sources and references.
- International Information Network (Internet).

Main Research Procedures:

Structured Sports Activity Program

Based on a comprehensive review of what was included in Arabic and foreign sources from previous studies and literature in the fields of sports psychology, sociology, and psychological counseling, and the information they provided regarding the foundations of building interventional psychological and sports programs, the researcher prepared a structured sports activity program (Appendix 3) aimed at reducing psychological stress and its role in mitigating burnout among dormitory students at the University of Anbar, along with enhancing their level of psychological resilience. The program was designed according to solid scientific standards approved in program preparation, as the program was designed in its initial form of 14 training sessions at a rate of (two sessions) weekly, with a duration of 45 minutes per session, based on what specialized literature indicates regarding appropriate time durations to achieve the desired psychological effects.

The program included a set of structured sports activities in which consideration was given to their suitability for the characteristics of the sample and the living environment in the dormitories, focusing on developing social interaction, improving the regulation of emotional responses, and enhancing feelings of belonging and psychological adaptation, which contributes to reducing burnout indicators among students. The program also included a set of applied methods used in psychological and sports programs, including (learning through practice, modeling, reinforcement, feedback), in addition to accompanying counseling during the implementation of the training sessions, with the aim of supporting the acquisition of positive behavioral patterns that contribute to improving psychological and social adaptation and enhancing psychological resilience among students.

Psychological Stress Scale (Ali, 2007):

The psychological stress scale used in this research was designed by Al-Jumaili (2007), and the scale consists of 24 items formulated to measure the level of psychological stress among individuals; the student answers the scale with five alternatives, which are (always, often, sometimes, rarely, never), and these alternatives were given graded numerical weights reaching (5, 4, 3, 2, 1) respectively. Such that a high score indicates a high level of psychological stress, while a low score reflects a lower level of stress. Accordingly, the total score of the scale ranges between 24 as a minimum and 120 as a maximum, with a hypothetical mean of 72, and through it, the level of psychological stress among the members of the research sample can be determined accurately.

Burnout Scale (Obaid, 2020):

The current study adopted the burnout scale designed by (Hanan Shihab Obaid, 2020), Appendix (2), to measure the level of burnout among students, which reflects the state of psychological depletion resulting from continuous exposure to stress. The scale consists of 20 statements, distributed over three main dimensions: emotional exhaustion, which refers to the feeling of fatigue and psychological depletion; emotional blunting or distancing, which reflects weak emotional interaction and apathy; as well as a low sense of

personal accomplishment, which is represented in a reduced sense of competence and dissatisfaction with performance level. A five-point Likert scale was allocated for the scale to answer the items, represented by (completely, often, sometimes, rarely, never at all), where scores (5, 4, 3, 2, 1) are given respectively for all items. The total score of the scale ranges between (20–100) points, with a hypothetical mean of (60), as high scores exceeding the hypothetical mean indicate a high level of burnout among students, while scores lower than the hypothetical mean reflect a low level of burnout among them.

Scientific Foundations of the Used Scales Reliability of the Scale

To verify the reliability of the scales, the researcher used the test-retest method to calculate the reliability coefficient of the scales, where the researcher applied the scales to a sample of 10 students outside the research sample, then the researcher reapplied the scales to the same sample after 14 days had passed and under conditions similar to the first application. Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated between the first and second applications.

Validity of the Scales / Face Validity

The researcher verified the validity of the scales by presenting them to a group of experts and specialists in educational and psychological sciences, achieving an expert agreement rate of more than (75%), thereby confirming the content validity of the test.

Pilot Experiments

First: The First Pilot Experiment

The first pilot experiment for the psychological stress and burnout scales was conducted on October 20, 2025, on 10 students, and its purpose was:

1. To ensure the clarity of the instructions regarding how to answer the scales.
2. To evaluate the clarity of the items and the respondents' reactions to them.
3. To identify difficulties and errors that might hinder the application process, and to calculate the time taken to complete answering all scale items.

Second: The Second Pilot Experiment

The researcher conducted the second pilot experiment on October 21, 2025, concerning the sessions of the structured sports activity program.

1. Determining the appropriate time for each session of the program.
2. Evaluating the efficiency of the techniques used during the program's sessions.
3. Knowing the sample's readiness to receive the sessions and interact with them.
4. Distributing the components of each session according to their importance and time duration relative to the total time.

Main Research Procedures:

Pre-measurement

The pre-measurement for the concepts of (psychological stress and burnout) was conducted on the members of the research sample on Sunday, October 23, 2025, and the researcher took into account the temporal and spatial conditions for conducting the measurement; during the application of the measurement, care was taken to clarify and explain the items, as well as to explain the method of answering them, to distance the students from each other, to emphasize to the students the necessity of being accurate in answering the scale items, and not to allow them to view others' answers.

Implementation of the Main Research Experiment

The members of the experimental group underwent a structured sports activity program supported by psychological counseling aspects, where the researcher, in the introductory session, presented a comprehensive overview of what the program is, its objectives, and its importance, focusing on its role in enhancing the students' ability to manage psychological stress well, which would reflect positively on reducing burnout levels. The meeting also included clarifying the mechanisms of implementing the sessions, defining the framework for interaction within them, in addition to explaining the mutual commitments that contribute to raising the level of discipline and active participation among the sample members. The application of the program began on Sunday, October 26, 2025, and continued until December 10, 2025, for seven continuous weeks, at a rate of two sessions per week held on Sundays and Wednesdays, with each session lasting 45 minutes. The researcher relied in implementing the program on a set of structured sports activities coupled with psychological counseling directives, with the assistance of specialists and experts in the field of sports psychology, in a manner consistent with the objectives and content of the sessions, and contributing to improving psychological adjustment and reducing the severity of psychological stress and burnout among dormitory students at the University of Anbar.

Post-measurement:

The post-test (psychological stress, burnout) was applied to the two research groups (experimental and control) on Thursday, December 12, 2025, and the researcher took into account the same conditions under which the pre-test was conducted.

Statistical methods:

For data collection and analysis purposes, the authors used the comprehensive statistical package SPSS V 26 due to the ease of data analysis (Abdullateef AbdulJabbar et al., 2025; Fayyad et al., 2026; Khalaf et al., 2025).

Result and Discussion

Presentation of the results of the experimental and control groups for the pre and post tests in the study variables:

Table 1. Equivalence of the experimental and control groups

No.	Tests	Groups	Mean	Standard Deviation	Calculated (T) Value	Tabular T	Significance
1	Psychological Stress	Experimental	89.73	7.85	0.81	2.05	Non-significant
		Control	87.90	6.90			
2	Burnout	Experimental	78.50	4.50	0.92	2.05	Non-significant
		Control	77.13	4.04			

*Non-significant when the calculated t-value is less than the tabular one.

Presentation of the results of the experimental group for the pre and post tests in the study variables

Table 2. shows the means, standard deviations, calculated t-value, and tabular t-value for the variables under study for the experimental group.

No.	Tests	Pre-test	Post-test	Calculated (T) Value	Significance Level	Significance
		Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD			
1	Psychological Stress	89.73 ± 7.85	75.60 ± 5.30	6.21	2.14	Significant
2	Burnout	78.50 ± 4.50	64.20 ± 3.80	7.10	2.14	Significant

*Significant when the calculated t-value is greater than the tabular one.

Presentation of the results of the control group in the pre and post tests in the study variables.

Table 3. shows the means, standard deviations, calculated t-value, and tabular t-value for the variables under study for the control group.

No.	Tests	Pre-test	Post-test	Calculated (T) Value	Significance Level	Significance
		Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD			
1	Psychological Stress	87.90 ± 6.90	86.20 ± 6.10	1.12	2.14	Non-significant
2	Burnout	77.13 ± 4.04	65.73 ± 3.27	2.03	2.14	Non-significant

*Significant when the calculated t-value is greater than the tabular one.

Presentation of the results of the experimental and control groups for the post tests in the study variables.

Table 4. shows the means, standard deviations, calculated t-value, and tabular t-value between the experimental and control groups in the post-test for the variables under study.

No.	Tests	Groups	Mean	Standard Deviation	Calculated (T) Value	Significance Level	Significance
1	Psychological Stress	Experimental	75.60	5.30	4.85	2.05	Significant
		Control	86.20	6.10			
2	Burnout	Experimental	64.20	3.80	3.97	2.05	Significant
		Control	65.73	3.27			

*Significant when the calculated t-value is greater than the tabular t-value.

Discussion

It is evident from Table (1) that the differences between the experimental and control groups in the variables of psychological stress and burnout were limited and statistically non-significant. In psychological stress, a slight difference appeared in the mean in favor of the experimental group; however, the calculated (t) value (0.81) came out to be less than the tabular value (2.05), which indicates the non-significance of this difference. The same applied to burnout, as the differences between the two means were weak, and the calculated (t) value (0.92) did not reach the level of statistical significance. This indicates in general that the two groups were convergent in their psychological characteristics prior to implementing the program, which enhances their equivalence and makes any subsequent change attributable to the effect of the utilized program.

The results of Table (2) indicate the presence of statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in the variables of psychological stress and burnout, as the arithmetic means decreased noticeably in the post-measurement, and the calculated (t) values reached (6.21) and (7.10) respectively, which are higher than the tabular value (2.14), a matter that reflects the program's effectiveness in bringing about a tangible improvement in the psychological state among the sample members. The decrease in the level of psychological stress can be explained in light of the opportunities provided by the program to develop psychological adaptation skills, and to enhance individuals' capability to deal with stressful situations in more efficient ways, and this interpretation is supported by what (Al-Khodari, 2003) pointed out, "that engaging in structured activities, especially physical ones, contributes to achieving a better degree of psychological balance and reducing tension" (Al-Khodari, 2003). As for burnout, the recorded decrease can be attributed to the nature of the program which provided a positive psychological environment, and helped in limiting emotional exhaustion and enhancing motivation, which aligns with what Ahmed Abdul-Jawad (2008) indicated regarding "the effectiveness of counseling programs in reducing the manifestations of burnout" (Mohammad, 2003). At the level of sports psychology, these results are reinforced by what (Rateb, 2000) indicated, "as he confirmed that programs combining psychological preparation and structured physical activity contribute to reducing stress and burnout, by providing opportunities for

emotional discharge and enhancing psychological adjustment" (Rateb, 2000). Based on the foregoing, it can be concluded that the improvement occurring in the variables of psychological stress and burnout is considered an indicator of the efficiency of the utilized program, and reflects the consistency of the results with what Arabic literature confirmed, that structured counseling and sports programs represent an effective approach to enhancing mental health and limiting manifestations of tension and psychological fatigue. It is evident from Table (3) that there is stability in the levels of the variables of psychological stress and burnout among the members of the control group between the pre- and post-measurements. Regarding psychological stress, the mean for the pre-measurement reached (87.90) compared to (86.20) in the post-measurement, with a standard deviation of (6.90 and 6.10) and a calculated (t) value of (1.12), which is less than the tabular value (2.14), indicating the absence of significant differences. As for burnout, the mean recorded a decrease from (77.13) in the pre-measurement to (65.73) in the post-measurement, with a decrease in the standard deviation from (4.04) to (3.27), and a calculated (t) value (2.03) less than the tabular value, which also reflects the lack of statistical significance for the differences. This stability reflects that the levels of psychological stress and burnout among the control group were not affected during the study period, which enhances the credibility of the experimental design and guarantees that any subsequent changes in the experimental group can be attributed to the structured program and not to external factors or initial differences between individuals. The slight decrease in standard deviation also shows greater stability in individuals' responses around the mean.

The presented results indicate the presence of statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups in both psychological stress and burnout, which reflects the effectiveness of the applied intervention on the students in the experimental group. As it appears from Table (4) that the mean of psychological stress among the experimental group reached (75.60) with a standard deviation of (5.30), compared to the control group's mean of (86.20) with a standard deviation of (6.10). And the calculated (t) value (4.85) at a significance level (2.05) indicates that the difference between the two groups is statistically significant. This decrease in psychological stress among the experimental group reflects the impact of the structured activity program in alleviating anxiety and psychological tension resulting from intense university life, and this agrees with the findings of the study by (Al-Qaisi, 2021) which confirmed "that practicing structured sports activities reduces psychological stress among university students" (Al-Qaisi, 2021). Also, a study by (Al-Ali, 2020) demonstrated "that counseling and sports programs inside university dormitories help to enhance psychological adaptation skills and noticeably reduce daily stress" (Al-Ali, 2020).

As for burnout, the experimental group recorded a mean of (64.20) with a standard deviation of (3.80), against the control group (65.73) with a standard deviation of (3.27), and the calculated (t) value reached (3.97) compared to the significant level (2.05), which indicates the presence of a significant difference in favor of the experimental group. This decrease reflects the effectiveness of the intervention in limiting the manifestations of psychological exhaustion which include (emotional exhaustion, low motivation, and feeling

of low self-efficacy), and this was confirmed by the study of (Al-Momani, 2022) where it clarified "that structured counseling and sports programs reduce burnout among students through improving psychological energy management and enhancing self-skills, and clearly contribute to reducing levels of academic burnout" (Al-Momani et al., 2022).

The results can be explained relying on Lazarus's theory of psychological stress, which asserts that psychological stress results from the individual's inability to adapt to environmental stimuli, and that structured interventions can reduce these effects; from an applied perspective, the decrease in psychological stress and burnout among the experimental group reflects the students' interaction with a supportive environment, the use of effective adaptation strategies, and the regular practice of activities that regulate the psychological response to daily academic demands, thereby the results confirm the importance of integrating sports and counseling programs within the university environment to improve students' mental health, and reduce burnout, in a way that contributes to raising their level of academic and emotional performance.

Conclusion

1. The study results showed a significant decrease in the levels of psychological stress among the research sample, which reflects the effectiveness of the sports and counseling program in improving psychological adjustment and reducing daily tension.
2. Burnout scores showed a noticeable decrease among the research sample, which confirms the intervention's capability to limit emotional exhaustion and improve self-efficacy among students.
3. The results support the importance of integrating physical activity and psychological counseling as an integrated strategy to enhance mental health and regulate the response to academic pressures.
4. The results reflect the positive role of structured programs in the university environment in enhancing psychological adjustment and mitigating burnout among dormitory students.

Recommendations

1. Universities and dormitories should adopt continuous structured programs aimed at reducing psychological stress and burnout among students, taking into account the continuity of interventions throughout the academic year.
2. Designing integrated programs that combine physical activity and psychological counseling to enhance mental health and equip students with practical skills to adapt to daily pressures.
3. Training university cadres and workers in dormitories on methods of providing psychological support and stress management to ensure a psychologically supportive educational environment.
4. Conducting long-term follow-up studies to evaluate the impact of programs and interventions on students' mental health and ensuring the improvement of their design and effectiveness in the future.

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