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Confidence Levels Among Athletes Returning to Sport After Acute Ankle Sprain

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I. INTRODUCTION

Ankle sprains are among the most common musculoskeletal injuries in sports involving rapid changes of direction, such as futsal, football, basketball, and netball [1]. Although physical rehabilitation is often emphasised, psychological readiness, particularly confidence, also plays a crucial role in safe return to sport [2]. However, most studies have focused on surgical or elite athletes, leaving a gap in understanding non-surgical university athletes with acute ankle sprains [3]. In Malaysia, high-risk sports expose student-athletes to frequent ankle injuries, yet psychological assessment is rarely integrated into rehabilitation [4]. Recent models, such as PAASS, highlight multidimensional recovery, but short-term psychological readiness remains underexplored [5]. Therefore, this study aimed to measure confidence levels, compare weekly variations, and examine their relationship with return-to-sport status among university athletes.

II. METHODS

Twelve college athletes aged between 18 and 25 years who had sustained an acute ankle sprain within the previous four weeks were recruited from sporting activities. Demographic data were collected using Google Forms, and confidence was measured weekly over four weeks using the Injury Psychological Readiness to Return to Sport Scale (IPRRS) distributed via WhatsApp. Data were analysed using Jamovi software. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to summarise the data, while repeated-measures ANOVA was used to evaluate changes over time. Pairwise comparisons were performed, with the significance level set at $p < .05$.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Confidence levels gradually increased across the four weeks of rehabilitation, with the lowest scores recorded in Week 1, when athletes were most susceptible to fear of re-injury and self-doubt. Repeated-measures ANOVA showed a significant difference across weeks ($p < .05$), indicating improved psychological readiness over time [2]. These results suggest that psychological assessment should be included in the rehabilitation process, alongside physical recovery [2]. The Injury

Psychological Readiness to Return to Sport Scale (IPRRS) is a practical tool for monitoring confidence and supporting a more holistic recovery approach that considers both physical and psychological aspects [5][7].

TABLE I
PAIRWISE COMPARISON

Comparison	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	p-value
Week 1 → Week 2	12.5 → 171.0	22.6 → 114.0	.015
Week 2 → Week 3	171.0 → 296.0	114.0 → 98.8	
Week 3 → Week 4	296.0 → 500.0	98.8 → 128.0	
Week 1 → Week 4	12.5 → 500.0		

Confidence increased significantly between Week 1 and Week 2 ($p < .001$) and between Week 2 and Week 3 ($p < .001$). Although the increase between Week 3 and Week 4 was less pronounced, it remained significant ($p = .015$), suggesting continued improvement with a plateau effect towards the final phase of recovery.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study identifies confidence as an important predictor of safe return to sport among athletes recovering from acute ankle sprain. Although the findings were limited by the small sample size and short observation period, they provide useful information on short-term psychological recovery and highlight the need to integrate mental readiness with physical rehabilitation. The findings indicate that confidence increases steadily during the early phases of recovery, supporting the use of tools such as the IPRRS to monitor psychological preparedness. Future studies should include larger and more diverse samples, longer follow-up periods, and mixed-methods designs to strengthen external validity and provide a more integrated understanding of the interaction between physical and psychological factors in return-to-sport decision-making.

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