

# Psychological Benefits of Special Olympic Involvement

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# Background – Key players.

- Research project for Clinical Psychology training
- In association with Canterbury Christchurch University, SOUK, SO US, Mencap.
- Research team

# What do we know about some of the problems people with LD face?

- Health e.g. Obesity levels
- Mental illness
- Social networks
- Stress levels
- Self esteem
- How does sport come into this?



In mainstream society sport has been found to be a very effective intervention improving social and health issues.

So what do we know about its impact on these issues for people with learning disabilities?

# Research questions

Within the population of people attending ID organisations....

- Does sport via Mencap or Special Olympics increase self esteem?
- Does sport via Mencap or Special Olympics increase social networks?
- Does sport via Mencap or Special Olympics lower stress?
- Does sport via Mencap or Special Olympics increase quality of life?



# Participants

- 44 Female, 57 male (n=101)
- Mean age 35.1 (range 18-67)
- 64 single, 31 boy or girlfriend, 6 married
- 30 employed in voluntary work, 13 paid employment, 30 studying, 26 neither studying or in employment

# Design

- Cross-sectional design comparing 3 groups
  - 1) involved in sport via the (SO), n=51
  - 2) involved in sport but not via the SO, n=20
  - 3) not involved in sport, n=30
- DVs : levels of stress, quality of life and self-esteem, and engagement in social networks.
- IV was group membership (sport or non-sport).



Special  
Olympics  
(N 40)

- Social networks
- Self-esteem
- Quality of life
- Stress

Mencap  
(N 34)

- Social networks
- Self-esteem
- Quality of Life
- Stress

Matched  
➤ gender  
➤ IQ  
➤ Opportunity

# Measures

- WASI (Wechsler, 1997) 2 subtest form
- Life Experiences Checklist (Ager, 1990)
- Rosenberg Self-esteem Measure (Rosenberg, 1965)
- Life Stress Inventory (Bramston & Bostock, 1994)
- Social Support Self Report (Lunsky & Benson, 1997)



# Results

- Self esteem and LEC positively and significantly correlated

# Results & Clinical implications

- Of the three groups only SO predictive of higher levels of SE
- Suggests there is something additional to playing sport that SO offers
- SO specific research – awards, terminology athletes, identity, systemic involvement, etc etc etc +++



# Qualitative research

- Community

*'Like playing sports, meeting up with friends and coaches, tell each other stories, made some new friends. Like the coaches they make it fun'*

- Self esteem, worth, confidence

*'Being with the team, skiing is my life, I feel like a bond girl coming down the slopes'*

- Learning

*'It keeps me fit and active. I meet new and different people. I can make decisions, go on holidays – it helps me learn new things for the future'*

- Fitness

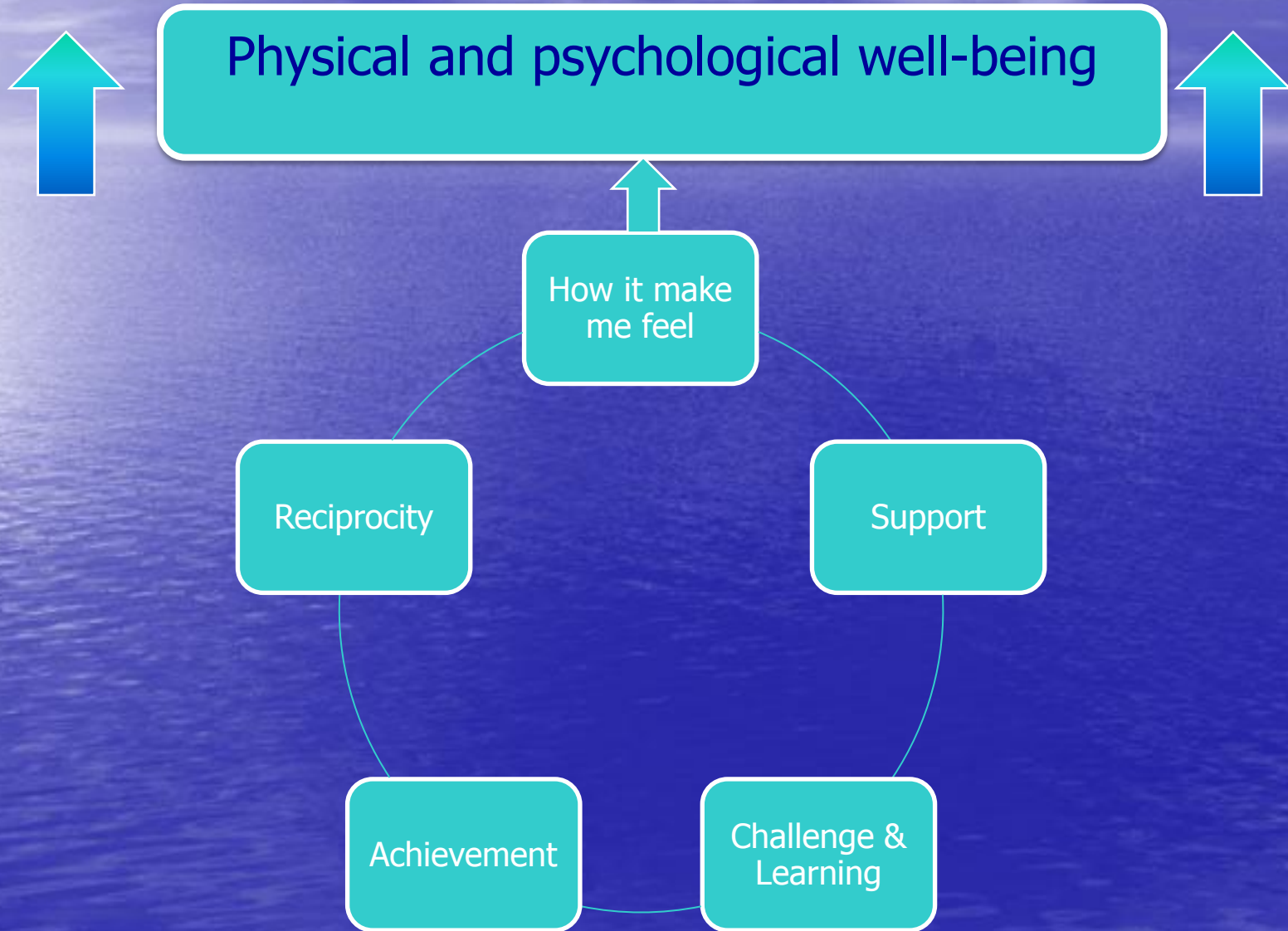
*'Like working out, like getting stronger'*

# Further research needs

- Unable to state a causal effect, can only say there is a difference
- IQ? Social construct? Measurement
- +++++



# Implications



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- Sport/SO involvement maybe viewed as an intervention to improve physical and mental well being
- Sport/SO involvement maybe viewed as a potential protective factor against poor physical and mental well being
- How might other organisations draw upon these findings.
- ParaOlympics – sense of community, integrating/inclusion. Emphasis in capability rather than incapability +++





# Thank you!

- Questions at the end.....
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