

Abstract

All over the world, sports have been known to bring social cohesion at the individual, family and socio-economic development to a country. Over the years, in Kenya, athletics have promoted development, aesthetic value and recognition to the country and individuals as well. Despite the positive impact athletics can have on development to a country and individuals, studies have shown that athletes do not receive much psychosocial support to reach their full potentials and participate effectively in the general development of the country. This study examined the psychosocial challenges facing athletes in Eldoret, Kenya. The study specifically investigated individual-related psychosocial challenges; family and community-related psychosocial challenges facing athletes; and the coping strategies devised by athletes to deal with psychosocial problems in the study area. The study was informed by Social Breakdown Theory (SBT) theory. The study used descriptive research design. The study targeted medium and long distance runners in Eldoret and limited itself to 99 professional athletes from 8 locations that are major sources of athletes in Eldoret through simple random sampling. The study used snowball sampling in selecting key informants (elite athletes) from each selected location and government officials from the sports ministry. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were used. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. In qualitative analysis, the data was presented by use of quotes and narrative descriptions. Quantitative analysis involved derivation of statistical descriptions and interpretation of data by use of descriptive statistics that purely relied on numerical values. The study found that athletes (medium and long-distance runners), have not been given much psychosocial support. Instead, they are exposed to much vulnerability aggravated by lack of social acceptance, over-dependence by close kin, isolation, lack of mentorship and peer support and are thus unable to participate effectively in the sport. The study recommends that there is a need to designing appropriate interventions that mitigate psychosocial challenges among athletes to promote athletes' wellness and personal development.