

**179** PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF SPORT PSYCHOLOGIST

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A major problem in the field of sport psychology is that few people understand what sport psychology is, and what sport psychologists do. For a large segment of the population the term 'psychology' connotes issues related to mental health or psychopathology, and this perception is difficult to overcome. 'Sport Psychology' is a term used to refer to the psychological aspects of sport, physical recreation, physical education, exercise, health and related physical activities. The International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP) is dedicated to the development and professionalisation of the field of sport psychology from a global perspective. The qualifications of individuals practicing in the area of sport psychology are diverse with the majority of practitioners receiving graduate degrees from physical education colleges and departments of physical education of various universities. Although, there are international associations who have developed certification programmes in which sport psychology consultants must hold a graduate degree related to sport psychology and have specialised training in the area (including knowledge of psychopathology), licensing procedures are limited, more specifically in Indian condition. It is the individual responsibility of each sport psychologist to aspire to the highest possible standards of conduct. It is expected that each sport psychologist will act in accordance, and not violate, the values and rules described in the ethical principles, as well as the values and norms of one's culture. The consumer (athletes and coaches) should ultimately understand that sport psychologists help athletes, coaches and teams with some of these aspects such as: assessing/profiling strengths and weaknesses, performance anxiety,

coping with pressure, career transition issues, coach-athlete communication, self-confidence/efficacy, time management, coping with injury, team building, initiating and maintaining exercise behaviours, teaching mental skills such as goal setting, self-talk, imagery, concentration, emotional control, etc. The how of education is in dire need of creative efforts because our current approaches have not been entirely successful? Courses and degree offerings in universities generally do a good job, but this serves a fairly small part of the population – college students and many of these are post graduates. Professional associations such as AAASP, ISSP, APA (division 47), ASPASP generally target their education efforts to their membership. In India we have SPAI (Sport Psychology Association of India) and that too target to the membership without offering much in this direction of professionalism in sport psychology. There are codes of ethics that regulate ISSP professionals in sport psychology and the same is applied to any practitioner in sport psychology. But in India we do not have any stringent measure or criteria. Though we have in India the SPAI but it no way caters to the need of this aspect of professionalisation. I believe professional training of the next generation of sport psychologists is one of our biggest challenges. One challenge stems from the fact that sport psychology is truly an interdisciplinary field that requires collaboration between psychology, education and sport science. University departments have a long history of territory protection rather than collaboration and professional organisations tend to be discipline specific. This is unfortunate because sport psychology requires not only specialised knowledge in a number of areas but also supervised internship experiences as well as a strong understanding of the ethics involved in working as a sport psychologist.