

The Role of Self-Talk on the Mental Health of Athletes with a History of Injury

Sakatlık Öyküsü Olan Sporcuların Zihinsel Sağlığı Üzerinde Kendi Kendine Konuşmanın Rolü

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Abstract: Both maintaining an active lifestyle and participating in sports provide numerous physical and mental health benefits while also offering social and cultural advantages. Sports scientists and health professionals frequently recommend regular physical activity. However, the risk of injury associated with sports should not be overlooked. Injuries can lead not only to physical limitations but also to psychological issues, making it crucial for male athletes to develop skills that help maintain mental well-being. In this context, the first phase of this qualitative study examined the role of self-talk skills in the mental health of male athletes, analyzing their perceptions and experiences. For this purpose, relevant studies were reviewed through various databases, and researchers developed ten open-ended questions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with athletes who had experienced at least one injury, using the snowball sampling method. In the second phase of the study, content analysis was conducted to identify themes and sub-themes, and participant statements were used for evaluation. The findings revealed that male athletes perceive mental health within the framework of human needs and establish a stronger perceptual connection between masculinity and mental well-being. Athletes reported that they faced more psychological challenges than physical difficulties during the injury process and that their self-talk had a positive impact on their mental health, performance, and overall well-being. Additionally, participants stated that as their positive self-dialogue increased, they felt better and became more motivated to return to sports. Furthermore, they acknowledged self-talk as an essential strategy for protecting mental health.

Keywords: Mental health, self-talk, sport injury

Özet: Hem aktif bir yaşam tarzını sürdürmek hem de spora katılmak, fiziksel ve zihinsel sağlık açısından birçok fayda sağlarken, aynı zamanda sosyal ve kültürel avantajlar da sunar. Spor bilimciler ve sağlık profesyonelleri de düzenli spor yapmayı sıkça tavsiye etmektedir. Ancak, sporla birlikte gelen yaralanma riski göz ardı edilmemelidir. Yaralanmalar, fiziksel sınırlamaların yanı sıra psikolojik sorunlara da yol açabilir ve özellikle erkek sporcular için zihinsel sağlığı koruyacak becerilerin geliştirilmesi büyük önem taşımaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, yapılan bu nitel araştırmanın ilk aşamasında, erkek sporcuların zihinsel sağlığında içsel konuşma becerilerinin rolü incelenmiş ve sporcuların algıları ile deneyimleri analiz edilmiştir. Bu amaçla, çeşitli veri tabanlarından ilgili çalışmalar taranarak araştırmacılar tarafından 10 açık uçlu soru geliştirilmiştir. Veriler, en az bir yaralanma geçmişine sahip sporculardan, kartopu örnekleme yöntemiyle yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Araştırmanın ikinci aşamasında, içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılarak temalar ve alt temalar oluşturulmuş, katılımcı ifadelerinden örnekler verilerek değerlendirmeler yapılmıştır. Bulgular, erkek sporcuların zihinsel sağlığı insan ihtiyaçları çerçevesinde ele aldıklarını ve erkek cinsiyeti ile zihinsel sağlık arasında daha güçlü bir algısal ilişki kurduklarını göstermiştir. Sporcular, yaralanma sürecinde fiziksel zorluklardan çok psikolojik zorluklarla mücadele ettiklerini ve bu dönemde içsel konuşmalarının zihinsel sağlıklarını, performansları ve genel iyilik halleri üzerinde olumlu etkileri olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Yine katılımcılar, pozitif içsel diyalogları arttıkça kendilerini daha iyi hissettiklerini ve spora geri dönmek için daha motive olduklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Ayrıca, içsel konuşmanın bir zihinsel sağlık koruma stratejisi olarak önemini daha fazla fark ettiklerini dile getirmişlerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Zihinsel sağlık, kendi kendine konuşma, spor sakatlığı.



Academic Editor: Akan Bayraktar

Received: 15.01.2024

Accepted: 07.03.2025

Published: 28.03.2025

Citation: Akyol, G. (2025). The Role of Self-Talk on the Mental Health of Athletes with a History of Injury, *Journal of Sport for All and Recreation*, 7(1), 32-41.

<https://doi.org/10.56639/jsar.1620390>

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1. Introduction

Engaging in an active lifestyle and participating in sports provides not only various physical and mental health benefits (Warburton et al., 2006) but also social and cultural advantages, which is why experts frequently recommend it. According to its known benefits, being physically active reduces the risk of mental health disorders, obesity, diabetes, hypertension (Singh et al., 2020), as well as other chronic diseases (Bouchard et al., 2012; Shin et al., 2024). However, the risk of injury associated with sports participation should not be overlooked (Fullagar et al., 2017), as these injuries represent a health issue directly or indirectly linked to physical inactivity, medical treatment, and absenteeism (in this context, inability to participate in training and competitions). Therefore, preventing injuries (Verhagen et al., 2015; Vriend et al., 2017) or successfully overcoming the injury process is crucial for maintaining an active lifestyle or sports participation, which is also known to affect an athlete's physical and psychological well-being and return-to-play process. Gledhill et al. (2020) suggested that for an athlete's return to sport, they should have a holistic plan that considers the surgery process, pre-injury performance level, personality factors, and other social aspects, as well as stress, the

primary psychological factor (Grossbard et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2000; Tranaeus et al., 2018). Injury is a particularly devastating experience for individuals whose lives largely revolve around physical performance. The destructive experience refers to significant psychological difficulties such as increased anger, depression, anxiety, tension, fear, and decreased self-esteem (Walker et al., 2007), sudden imbalance, and mental health deterioration (Edouard et al., 2010; Yang et al., 2007). Various studies have suggested that as the return to sport approaches, concerns about re-injury, uncertainty about future experiences, and the fear of not achieving post-injury sporting goals negatively impact athletes' psychology (Podlog et al., 2015).

Despite the significance of mental health components in the injury process, Vriend et al. (2017) noted in their systematic review that interventions for sports injuries often focus on developing physical skills (Edvardsson et al., 2012; Tranaeus et al., 2015), with only a limited number of studies targeting improvements in psychological skills. Podlog et al. (2015) also indicated that within the mental health components, limited attention was given to specific skills, with a primary focus on athletes' coping strategies and their level of engagement in the rehabilitation process. From this, it can be inferred that mental components such as self-talk are often overlooked. Consequently, both physical and psychological skill development continues to be emphasized in the literature as crucial for athletes' return to sport post-injury. Measuring and evaluating cognitive factors like psychological coping and motivation can be challenging, but addressing elements such as positive self-talk (Scherzer et al., 2001), imagery (Milne et al., 2005), and goal setting (Evans & Hardy, 2002) can provide additional insights and lead to more specific conclusions regarding the injury process. From the athlete's perspective, Gledhill et al. (2020) found that athletes tend to focus solely on their injury and neglect their emotions during the injury process, suggesting that rehabilitation could benefit from techniques like imagery (Hamson-Utley & Vazquez, 2008), goal setting, positive self-talk (Arvinen-Barrow & Walker, 2013), and relaxation techniques (Dawson et al., 2014). In fact, when individuals experience mental or emotional health disturbances, they unconsciously or consciously engage in self-talk more frequently to compensate or resolve the issue (Grzybowski & Brinthaup, 2022). The literature also contains studies directly addressing the benefits of self-talk for mental health (Hamilton et al., 2011; Pathak & Chatterjee, 2024; Jones et al., 2024). However, self-talk can be either positive/motivational or negative/critical, with positive self-talk promoting positive mental and emotional states (Georgakaki & Karakasidou, 2017) and even serving as a key regulator in the mental well-being of individuals with health problems (Batool et al., 2024). Nevertheless, high levels of self-criticism, or negative self-talk, have been linked to neurotic disorders (Brinthaup et al., 2009). In the context of athletes, positive internal dialogue aids in improving sports performance, while negative internal dialogue negatively impacts performance (Tod et al., 2011). Therefore, the athlete's psychological resilience, mental health, and self-support are crucial factors (King et al., 2023). An example of this can be seen in the effectiveness of self-talk interventions in improving both the 800-meter finish time and mental toughness, a key mental health component, in runners (Cooper et al., 2021).

In the literature, numerous studies focus on self-talk and its effects on mental health, carried out with various sample groups and addressing different cognitive or affective skills through intervention and relational models. These studies explore aspects such as mental health (Powers 2024; Jones et al., 2024), mental toughness (Cooper et al., 2021), self-awareness and self-regulation (Racy & Morin, 2024; Grzybowski, 2021), competitive anxiety (Georgakaki & Karakasidou, 2017), cognitive components (Latinjak et al., 2020), and even work with cancer patients (Hamilton et al., 2011). Specifically, there are also quantitative studies that examine injury, mental health, and self-talk either individually or in combination (Tod et al., 2011; Galanis et al., 2016). However, no qualitative research has been found that focuses on the self-talk of male athletes with a history of injury and its effects on their mental health. This underscores the unique and valuable contribution of this research. The only comparable study found in terms of method and topic was conducted by Podlog and Dionigi (2010), which looked at coach strategies for athletes returning from injury. However, this study did not investigate how athletes themselves managed their injury processes, their mental health perceptions, or the role of self-talk. Furthermore, the difference in sample makes the current study distinct. This research aims to highlight how male athletes with a history of injury can maintain their mental health through positive self-talk during their return to sport. By focusing on their mental health, these athletes may navigate the recovery process more successfully and sustain their motivation to return to sport. The findings of this study may offer valuable insights for developing research hypotheses regarding the potential positive effects of self-talk on the mental health of injured male athletes. Additionally, the research could serve as a foundation for developing self-talk interventions or strategies tailored to injured athletes in different sports.

2.Method

Research Model: In the current study, which focuses on the role of self-talk in the mental health of male athletes, it was carried out with phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods. Research method is a process that emphasizes the perspective of the people involved in qualitative research, predicts the discoveries and evaluations of the researchers, and aims to understand the situation. The purpose of this method is to reveal what is under the surface with an in-depth research (Creswell, 2018). The phenomenology genre, on the other hand, is a research design that comes from philosophy and psychology, where the researcher tries to analyze the common experiences of individuals about a phenomenon. In this pattern, the aim is to understand the essence of the experiences of people who experience a certain phenomenon in depth (Creswell, 2018). Phenomenology, according to Patton (2014), investigates the true nature of a phenomenon. In this study, which deals with the phenomenon of disability, it was continued by obtaining research design-oriented responses from male athletes with the help of a semi-structured questionnaire.

Research Group: 18 professional male football players playing in the 2024-2025 Third League participated in the research. It is known that the players have a history of sports injury for the lowest 1 month and the longest for 1 year and stay away from the field. Only 3 of the players attended the internal speech training/seminar on sports held by the coach and federation officials. It is known

that 3 football players have previously received professional psychological support for game performance, anxiety and stress disorder. Participant characteristics are indicated in [Table 1](#). The adequacy of the number of participants was decided by other studies conducted in similar numbers ([Patton, 2014](#)). The criteria for inclusion in the study are: (I) having a history of sports injury for at least 2 weeks, (II) wanting to participate voluntarily (III) and having a professional sports life. Answers that did not fit the scope of the study or were insufficient for evaluation (3 participants) were not included in the study.

Data Collection: The research data were obtained by delivering semi-structured interview forms to the athletes by the coaches. The reason why this method is preferred is so that the participants are not exposed to any guidance, maintain their focus during the question-answer dialogue and give the first answers that come to mind when they read the questions ([Patton, 2014](#)). Snowball sampling method was used to collect the data. The questions, consisting of 7 main problems and 3 sub-problems (see [Table 1](#)), were prepared for the themes of "disability experience and its psychological effects", "self-talk and emotional state", "the role of self-talk" and "general mental health". This article focuses on the inductive evaluation of all the themes identified.

Table 1. Semi-structured theme and questions used for the data collection tool

Themes	Questions	
Injury Experience and Psychological Effects Problem	Problem	1. What are the elements necessary for mental health?
	Sub-Problem	1.1. What do you think is the relationship between male gender and mental health?
	Problem	2. How were you mentally affected when you were injured? Can you explain what emotions you experienced during this process?
	Problem	3. What was the biggest challenge in your transition back to sports after injury? Explain.
Self-Talk and Emotional State	Problem	4. Has your habit of talking to yourself changed after the injury? If yes, how has it changed?
	Problem	5. What messages did you give yourself (whether positive or negative) during your disability? Illustrate.
	Sub-Problem	5.1. What do you motivate yourself by saying to yourself when you are mentally challenged?
The Role of Self-Talk	Problem	6. How do you think self-talk has helped you in your healing process?
	Sub-Problem	6.1. How did your self-talk affect your performance during your recovery from injury?
General Mental Health	Problem	7. What relationship have you observed between self-talk and managing stress or anxiety?

Data Analysis: In the first stage of the analysis, each data obtained was coded as P(n). Then, with continuous comparisons of the data, the factors that ground the mental health elements of the athletes and the effect of these factors on the male athletes who underwent the injury process were focused. In the second phase of the research, the focus was on the evaluation of the role of self-talk in the mental health process and general health status in the disability process. The study used a fixed comparative analysis method to identify the main intratextual and intertextual themes ([Maykut & Morehouse, 2002](#)). In addition, coding, categorization and main themes were determined by content analysis method. Content analysis is a scientific approach that brings together similar data prepared in a language that readers can understand within the framework of certain concepts and themes, reproducible ([Krippendorff, 2018](#)) and allows an objective and systematic examination of verbal, written and other materials. Finally, researcher transcriptions used in the entire data analysis process. In general, "validity" is related to the accuracy of scientific findings, and "reliability" is related to the reproducibility of scientific findings.

The study was based on internal validity, external validity, internal reliability and external reliability criteria. For this reason, in order to ensure internal validity, the literature was examined while preparing the interview form. The method of the study is expressed in detail in order to ensure external validity. In order to increase the internal reliability of the research, the findings were reported both numerically with tables and annotated. In order to increase external reliability, the whole process is expressed in detail in the final reports. While analyzing the interviews, they were impartial. The analyses were carried out by multiple experts. Reliability calculations between encoders will be made and attention has been paid to Kappa compliance values.

Ethical Aspect of Research: The research was conducted with the permission of Aydin Adnan Menderes University Rectorate Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee dated 17/09/2024 and numbered 17/07 31906847/050.04.04-10.

3. Results

In this section of the study, the role of self-talk on mental health and overall well-being, based on the self-reports of male football players with a history of injury, is evaluated. Accordingly, demographic information ([Table 2](#)), mental health codes ([Figure 1](#)), the relationship between gender and mental health ([Table 3](#)), and the impact of self-talk during the post-injury process ([Table 4](#)) are presented through tables, assessments, and sample participant statements.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the sample group (pn)

P	Age	%	The Year of Sports	%	Duration of Disability	Self-Talk Work	Psychological Disorder Treatment
1	30	11.11	12	11.11	9 m.	Did not participate	N/A
2	23	5.56	7	5.56	7 m.	Did not participate	N/A
3	26	5.56	10	27.78	8 m.	Did not participate	Anxiety treatment
4	27	11.11	15	5.56	6 m.	Did not participate	N/A
5	27	11.11	10	27.78	12 m.	Did not participate	N/A
6	36	5.56	18	5.56	2 m.	By Federation	N/A
7	21	5.56	2	5.56	1 m.	Did not participate	N/A
8	31	11.11	13	5.56	2 m.	Did not participate	N/A
9	19	5.56	5	5.56	3 m.	By Coach	Mental therapy for performance
10	25	5.56	9	5.56	10 m.	Did not participate	N/A
11	28	11.11	10	27.78	6 m.	Did not participate	N/A
12	29	5.56	11	5.56	3 m.	Did not participate	N/A
13	32	5.56	10	27.78	3 m.	Did not participate	N/A
14	30	11.11	12	11.11	1 m.	By Federation	Stress disorder treatment
15	28	11.11	8	5.56	1 m.	Did not participate	N/A
16	31	11.11	10	27.78	1 m.	Did not participate	N/A
17	32	11.11	25	5.56	1 m.	Did not participate	N/A
18	24	5.56	6	5.56	1 m.	Did not participate	N/A

When the demographic distribution of the research group was examined, it was determined that the average age of the participants was 27.78 (5.56%) years, the average professional sports year was 10.72 (27.78%) years, and the average injury history was 4.27 months. Again, only 3 of the athletes (P6, P9, P14) received seminars or training on self-speaking skills, while 3 athletes reported that they received anxiety disorder, stress disorder and professional psychological support to improve performance (P3, P9, P14).

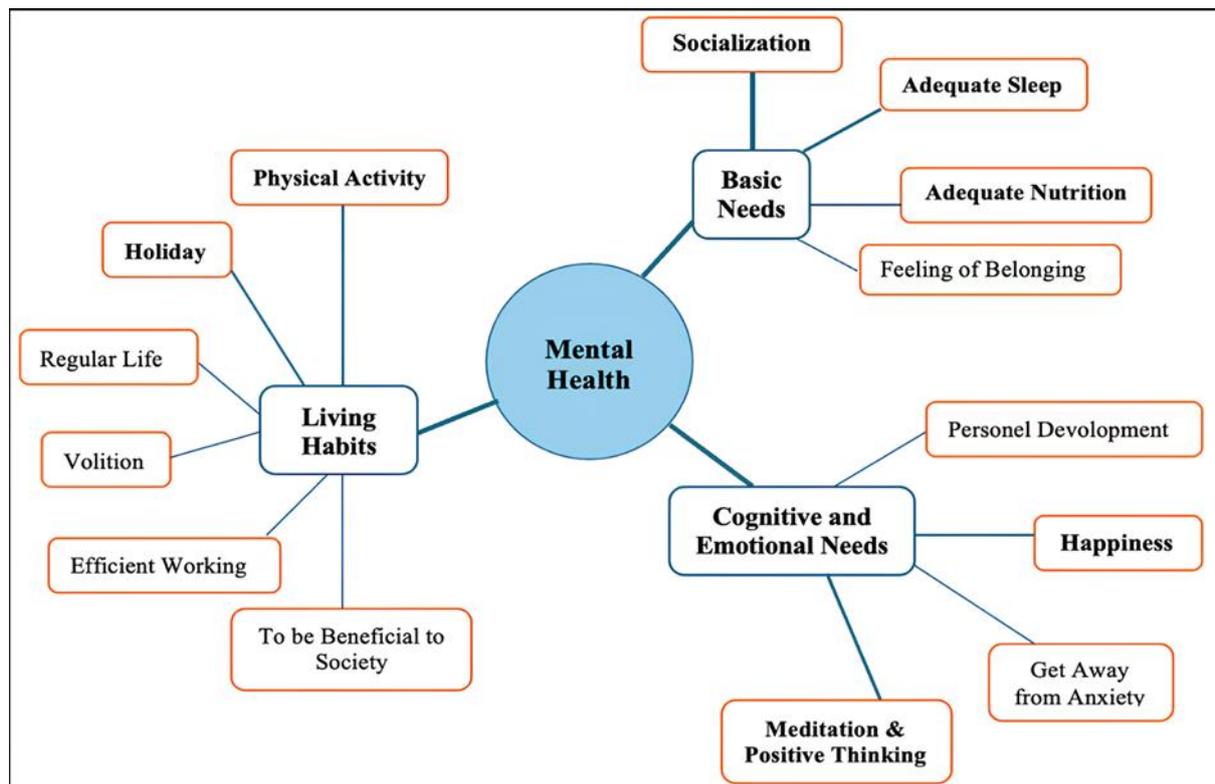


Figure 1. Tree Diagram of the "Mental Health" Codes of Male Athletes with a History of Injury

In the code tree diagram made to reveal the mental health perceptions of the research participants, the responses of professional male athletes to mental health were examined under the themes of "basic needs", "cognitive and emotional needs" and "life habits". As can be noticed in the diagram, codes with high frequencies are shown in bold/bold font. In this case, socialization in the theme of basic needs 8 times (P2-3, P5, P8-9-10, P12, P16), adequate rest 7 times (P2, P5-6-7-8-9, P13) and 4 times adequate nutrition (P6, P8, P13, P17) in the theme of cognitive and emotional needs, happiness (P5, P15, P18), meditation and positive thinking (P4, P9, P10, P11, P17) 3 times, avoidance of stress, personal development codes; In the theme of life habits, the codes of regular life,

being strong-willed, working efficiently and being beneficial to society have emerged, mainly participating in physical activity 4 times (P3, P6, P10, P2) and taking a vacation 3 times (P1, P10, P15). In this case, it can be interpreted that men with a history of professional sportsmanship think that in order to be mentally healthy or to maintain health, first of all, basic needs and secondary emotional needs should be met, and in order to maintain this, it is necessary to acquire and apply useful habits.

Question 1: What are the mental health elements in you? Can you explain?

P2: *"I think the most important thing for mental health is socialization and rest. Thinking and talking about the day I had while resting. Because when we play professional football, we are constantly in training and preparing for the match period. We are very tired physically, so I want to rest, and going out, meeting friends and shopping in the rest of the time allows me to relieve the stress of the day. That's why."*

Table 3. The relationship between male sex and mental health and its effect on the disability process

The Relationship Between Gender and Mental Health		The Impact of Disability on Mental Health			
	<i>f</i>	<i>Impact Type</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>Subcategories</i>
<i>Strong Relationship</i>	10	<i>Negative Impact</i>	Loneliness	8	Needy Desperation Pessimism
			Worry	9	Anxiety about not being able to return to sports Anxiety about the future Financial concern
			Emotion Disorder	10	Sorrow Nerve Burnout Stress Worry
<i>No Relationship</i>	8	<i>Positive Impact</i>	Self-Awareness	4	Learning to be patient Developing work discipline/Ambition Learning to develop a positive inner state Developing general awareness

The relationship between mental health and gender of professional male athletes and the mental states they experienced during the injury process are given in Table 2 in the form of types, categories and subcategories. According to the table, 10 of the study participants argued that there was a stronger relationship between mental health and male gender (P3-4-5-6, P9, P11-13, P15, P18), while 8 people claimed that mental health has the same importance for all genders and therefore is not related to gender (P1-2, P7-8, P10, P14, P16-17). Although it is noteworthy that the number of participants for the results is close to each other, it has been concluded that the majority of professional male athletes have a strong relationship between mental health and male gender.

P4: *"Men have to be strong to survive, and so does mental health."*

P13: *"Men have more responsibilities and life stresses than women. Life is hard and exhausting, so their mental health is important, if they can't protect it, they can't do a lot of things."*

P10: *"Mental health is not related to gender. The mental health elements are the same for everyone."*

The mental states experienced by professional male athletes during the injury process were examined as 2 types as "positive and negative effects". The type of negative effect was examined in 3 categories: "Loneliness", "Anxiety", "Emotional Disorder". The type of positive effect was examined under a single category as "Self-Awareness Awareness". When the frequencies of the categories were examined, it was stated that male athletes experienced a feeling of burnout, stress, anger and sadness during the injury process, as well as a wide return to sports and future anxiety, and loneliness, neediness for others, pessimism and helplessness during the injury process. It can be thought that these results are especially developed by personal expectation and societal expectation. In addition, the mental health element tree diagram results of male athletes also support the mental health elements they have experienced during the injury process. The positive effect of the injury process on the athletes was evaluated as self-awareness and according to the statements, the athletes stated that they were ambitious to work on getting stronger in order to return to football, they learned to be patient, they tried to manage the process by thinking positive things and making speeches, and finally, they were aware of the moment and tried not to be pessimistic. The important finding here is that the athletes (P9) who received responses that they turned the injury process into an advantage were individuals who were previously trained by the club to talk to themselves and received professional psychological support. Therefore, the mental support elements that an athlete in the injury process receives from outside are important in order to evaluate the process and his future well.

P9: "There is a stronger relationship with the male gender. Men can think more positively and deal with the problem. The injury process was difficult, but I tried to keep myself fit by thinking positively."

P17: "I didn't really relate, it feels like the same for everyone, but I was motivated and focused on the recovery process from the injury. I kept thinking that I was back and decided what I was going to do. I've had time to evaluate myself."

P2: "I think it's strongly associated, in fact, it's generally thought that men are stronger in every sense, and that's pressure. Our mental health is affected a lot by this, we have to think about everything and we have to look strong. My answer to the other question is that when I realize that I will not be able to meet some of my personal needs on my own after my injury, the feeling of having a companion who can take care of you and being dependent on him is something else, you feel helpless and in need of help, a situation that wears the person out mentally and psychologically."

Table 4. Post-injury challenges and the role of self-talk in this process

Perceived difficulties after injury			The effect of self-talk		
Categories	Subcategories	P	Categories	Subcategories	P
Psychologically Challenges	Not being ready for routine	12	Impact on Mental Health	Motivation to return to sports	8
	Worry about getting injured again			Self-knowledge	5
	Inability to recover from the feeling of disability			Not effective	4
	Negative reviews			Negative impact	1
	Feeling of inadequacy			Accelerating healing	11
Physical Challenges	Maintaining rehabilitation	6	Impact on Performance	Achieving the goal	3
	Physical pains			Not effective	3
	Gaining physical strength		Impact on General Health	Negative impact	1
				Stress reduction	9
		Providing life motivation	3		
		Learning to think positively	3		
		Boosting self-confidence	3		

The difficulties experienced by professional male athletes after injury were examined under 2 categories as "psychological and physical difficulty" and it was determined that the majority of athletes (12 people) made reports expressing "psychological difficulty". In this case, it can be said that the anxiety of being injured again and the feeling of not being ready to continue their routine lives in professional male athletes prevent the perceived physical difficulty. The effects of self-talk in coping with perceived difficulties after injury were examined in 3 different categories: "its effect on mental health, its effect on performance and its effect on general health". Its effect on mental health was reported by 8 people as increasing the motivation to return to sports, and 5 people as improving self-awareness and benefiting self-knowledge. The number of individuals who say that self-talk does not have a positive or negative effect on coping with post-injury problems is 4. This may be related to the disability process of the person, the conditions of the injury and the severity of the injury. In addition, 1 data stating that self-talk has a negative effect on mental health has been identified (P3). When the demographic characteristics of the participant are examined, it can be thought that they have previously received anxiety disorder treatment (See Table 1), so they may be more likely to engage in negative self-talk. Again, the negative effect expression specified in the category of effect on physical performance also belongs to P3. The effect of self-talk on performance in post-injury difficulties was reported with a positive effect on accelerating recovery (11 people) and helping to achieve the goal (3 people), while 3 people reported that self-talk did not have a positive or negative effect in the post-injury period. The effects of self-talk on general health after the disability period are all positive inferences such as reducing stress (9 people), providing life motivation (3 people), learning to think positively (3 people) and increasing self-confidence (3 people).

P9: "Since I started playing football, I have always talked to myself for 8 years, getting rid of negative energy and thinking positively. After the injury, I talked to myself as if I had never been injured, I tried not to think about it, and thus I overcame the fear in me. So mentally it helped. It was very difficult at first, but by staying positive, everything got better. Sometimes I have problems that I can't solve by talking to myself, and I share this with my best friend and get advice."

P10: "I've been talking to myself since I was a kid, and it became more and more during the injury process. At first, I talked to myself about how I would return much better and faster, and I was doing sports from where I was sitting, eating very regularly, and as the process dragged on, there were moments when I said that I could no longer play football and that I just wanted to walk, my nutrition and sleep patterns were disrupted. I told myself that I could not give up until I saw the end of the hard road and the effort I had put in to this day. Talking to ourselves definitely helps with the injury process and restores our belief in ourselves."

4. Discussion

In the second phase of this research, which first focused on the factors of grounding the mental health elements of professional male athletes and the effect of these factors on male athletes undergoing injury, it was aimed to evaluate the role of self-talk on mental

health and general health in the disability process. The findings of the research revealed that male athletes make sense of mental health elements in a total of 3 themes: basic needs, cognitive and affective needs, and life habits. In the category of basic needs, socialization, feeling of belonging to one's place, adequate sleep and nutrition codes have emerged. In the category of cognitive and affective needs, meditation and positive thinking, stress avoidance, happiness and personal development codes have emerged. In the category of life habits, the codes of physical activity, vacation, regular life, patience, effective work and being beneficial to society have emerged. In this case, it can be said that the mental health perceptions of professional male athletes consist of meeting and maintaining their personal basic needs. On the other hand, athletes' perceptions of mental health can also be explained by Maslow's hierarchy of basic needs (Schultz & Schultz, 2002), which is the most widely known in terms of human needs. It is seen that the main theories about human needs have been re-evaluated from a more eclectic perspective within the framework of positive mental health and individual development, especially by important representatives of the psychological well-being perspective. It is seen that the mental health outcomes of the current research are also compatible with these evaluation criteria. The criteria are listed as autonomy, environmental dominance, individual development, positive relationships with others, life goals and self-acceptance (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Therefore, in this study, it is seen that in-depth interviews with professional male athletes provide findings that support basic human needs. In the relevant literature, there are studies emphasizing the positive role of socialization, regular nutrition and physical health on holistic health. As a result, it can be said that professional male athletes attach intense or effective importance to their spiritual values in terms of mental health elements.

In the content analysis, it was determined that athletes had a stronger relationship between male gender and mental health. In addition, the number of people who report not being able to establish relationships is not small, but the important thing here is that those who use the phrase "not related" cannot depict what kind of relationship there is between mental health and gender. Therefore, as a result of the analysis, the finding of a strong relationship between men and mental health was accepted. Athletes expressed this situation as the mental health status should be stronger in men because men have to cope with more difficult situations. The literature shows that women are more likely to suffer psychological distress such as depression, anxiety, and lack of self-esteem (Eisenberg et al., 2009; Garrett et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2017) and that they have a worse coping strategy and do not create any differentiation with gender (Dyson & Renk, 2006; Conley et al., 2020). Although sports studies have emphasized gender-based differentiations in the psychological well-being of elite athletes (Beltz et al., 2018; Schaal et al., 2011) it is said that a universal consensus has not yet been reached (Cnen et al., 2021), so the current research result is considered to be an important contribution to the literature. In particular, it is noteworthy that the current research concludes that the mental health of male athletes in the process of injury will be affected by many negative factors that can be considered under the feeling of loneliness, anxiety and emotional disorder (See Table 2). The research results of Podlog et al. (2015) are also consistent with our findings.

Again, the determination of factors that can be examined under psychological difficulties such as not feeling ready for routine life, anxiety about being injured again, not being able to get rid of the feeling of injury and feeling sick, being exposed to negative comments and feeling inadequate for the majority of the difficulties they experience after injury supports the finding of a strong relationship between mental health and male athletes in the disability process. The research results of Podlog et al. (2015) are also consistent with our findings. Right here, self-talk is important as an important factor that will positively affect mental well-being, and in the results of the study, which serves the main purpose, the effects of self-talk on the injury process of male athletes were examined under the categories of mental health, performance and general health. The fact that it is examined in this way is that the data obtained are in accordance with the specified themes. Male athletes reported that their motivation to return to sports increased, they developed self-knowledge and positive thinking skills, their performance in achieving the goal by accelerating physical recovery by accelerating physical recovery, increased their self-confidence by reducing stress, and their general life motivation increased (See Table 4). The results of their research by Vriend et al. (2017) also support our findings. In this case, it can be said that self-talk, which emerges as a psychological skill, is an important influence factor for mental health in athletes in the process of injury. Therefore, it is recommended to increase the level of coping with undesirable situations of both amateur and professional level athletes with pre-structured positive self-talk interventions.

Conclusion

As a result of the research, it has been determined that all professional male football players associate mental health elements with basic needs and that men have a stronger relationship with mental health components depending on gender. It has been observed that they have higher mental difficulties than physical difficulties after injury. These mental difficulties were examined in the themes of loneliness, anxiety and emotional disorders, and it was determined that they mostly felt needy for someone else during the injury process, feeling pessimistic by feeling helpless due to limitation of movement, not being able to return to sports and worrying about the financial and future about how to maintain their lives, stress, anger, sadness and burnout. In addition, it was concluded that their self-talk during the disability process primarily had a positive effect on mental/psychological health and had a positive effect on physical performance and general health, respectively. In addition, there are participants who argue that self-talk is not effective and negatively affects the mental health and performance of male athletes who are in the process of injury. While the lack of experience with the concepts or the inability to depict the connection between the athletes who thought it was not effective was considered as the reason for the result, it was considered that only one person had professional support for anxiety disorder as the source of his statement that inner talk had a bad effect during the injury process. In this case, it should be taken into account that inner talk will have a negative effect on mental health in athletes with anxiety or anxiety disorders. Because for both mental and physical well-being, athletes must have high life motivation. In this case, it is important to provide the necessary psychological and moral support

by close relationship elements such as coaches, club managers, family in order to support the mental health of male athletes who are involved in professional sportsmanship, and to ensure that they receive professional support in order not to adversely affect their performance in cases where disorders are noticed. Finally, it is known that some professional athletes participate in various self-talk trainings organized by the club management or the federation, it has been observed that the answers of these athletes to the questions are more detailed and they use their mental skills more strongly while managing the injury process. Therefore, from this point of view, it is considered important for male athletes to acquire internal speech skills in order to cope with various acute or chronic difficulties that they may encounter. The fact that only 3 people among 18 athletes have experience represents the inadequacy of the importance given to the subject. From this point of view, it is considered important for club managers and federations to organize seminars for the mental well-being of athletes.

Author Contributions: The conceptualization, methodology, validation, analysis, research, references, writing-original drafting, writing-review, editing and visualization of this study were done by G.A. The author has read and accepted this version of the published article.

Financial Support: No financial support was received from institutions and/or institutions during the preparation and writing of this study.

Conflict of Interest: There is no conflict of interest between the authors regarding the publication of this article.

Informed Consent: Informed consent forms were obtained from all participants who participated in the study.

Declaration of Data Availability: Data are available for sharing upon request.

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank all participants who took part in the study.

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