



Positive Personality Strengths And Their Relationship To Psychological Defense Mechanisms Among Football Players In Nineveh Governorate Clubs

Mahmoud Matar Ali Al-Badrani^{1*}

¹College of Physical Education and Sport Science, University of Mosul, Mosul, Iraq

Correspondent Author: aboasaan2004@uomosul.edu.iq

Abstract

This study aimed to identify the levels of positive personality strengths and psychological defense mechanisms among youth football players in Nineveh Governorate clubs, as well as to examine the relationship between these two psychological constructs. The research population comprised 16 football clubs in Nineveh Governorate. The research sample was randomly selected from the research population and included 30 players for scale reliability testing, 20 players for the exploratory study, 250 players as a construction sample, and 50 players as an application sample. After excluding 13 players due to incomplete responses, the final discriminant sample consisted of 187 players. The researcher employed a descriptive correlational approach, which was appropriate for the research objectives. The research instruments included two scales: the Positive Personality Strengths Scale and the Psychological Defense Mechanisms Scale. The psychometric properties (validity, reliability, and objectivity) of both scales were established. The researcher concluded that the research sample generally demonstrated positive personality strengths above the hypothetical mean and psychological defense mechanisms below the hypothetical mean, indicating that participants generally possessed a favorable degree of positivity that positively influenced their athletic performance. Furthermore, a significant negative correlation was found between the research variables (positive personality strengths and psychological defense mechanisms) among youth football players in Nineveh Governorate clubs. The researcher recommends enhancing scientific research activities in the field of positive personality strengths and psychological defense mechanisms and their implications for sports activities in Nineveh Governorate clubs, as well as conducting experimental research to strengthen positive personality traits and reduce maladaptive psychological defense mechanisms among players in the governorate's clubs.

Keywords: Positive strengths of personality, psychological defense mechanisms, football players

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction and importance of the research

Among the critical factors to consider in understanding human behavior are psychological aspects, which significantly influence an individual's nature. A deficiency in these psychological dimensions can be a primary

cause of failure to achieve success and optimal performance, both for individuals in general and for athletes in competitive sports.

Positive personality strengths are relatively contemporary concepts within positive psychology. Their significance stems from their role in enabling individuals to control and manage situations, particularly those encountered by athletes during sports competitions and training sessions, as well as other psychological stressors. Athletes who possess the ability to regulate their thoughts and emotions are better equipped to confront challenges and overcome difficulties. These strengths also play a crucial and effective role in guiding and shaping behavior, influencing the extent of an individual's interaction with diverse situations. Furthermore, they provide athletes with opportunities to manage and control their feelings towards others, fostering an expectation of positive outcomes through insight and optimism. Individuals characterized by a positive personality tend to embrace calculated risks, exhibit a strong will for adventure, proactively avoid problems, and actively seek suitable opportunities for change. They consistently achieve favorable results at both personal and social levels. An individual with positive personality strengths experiences life with an optimistic outlook, characterized by resilience, hope, and transcendence (Khayb, 2008, p. 187). Such individuals also demonstrate a cooperative spirit and emotional stability.

The concept of psychological defense mechanisms is a pivotal construct in psychology, playing a significant role in how individuals cope with stressful situations. The study of psychological defense mechanisms has gained prominence in psychology, as these mechanisms contribute to a smooth and peaceful psychological life, free from persistent tensions. They enhance an individual's vitality and acceptance of life, thereby establishing the topic as a subject of organized scientific inquiry and an independent field of study. This area has become one of the most compelling human sciences for research and attention in the modern era, which is often characterized by anxiety and tension (Al-Adli, 2008, p. 34). Moreover, an individual's self-perception, which is profoundly influenced by their self-confidence and motivation for achievement and success, is also reflected in these mechanisms. Researchers' interest in psychological defense mechanisms, their antecedents, and treatment modalities has grown, evidenced by the emergence of scientific data confirming their detrimental effects on an individual's personality across social and psychological domains. These mechanisms can impede an individual's progress toward success and excellence if appropriate coping strategies are not adopted to manage them and adapt to the psychological pressure experienced. This adaptation is crucial for achieving superior performance. The interaction between an individual and their environment necessitates a continuous process of adaptation between internal psychological components and external circumstances. This process, referred to as coping strategies, enables individuals to achieve equilibrium between their external environment and their internal self, whether through internal changes (e.g., mobilizing energies, altering thoughts) or by modifying their approaches to environmental interaction and their aspirations (Al-Abdali, 2012, p. 8). Therefore, the importance of the research lies in identifying the positive personality forces and psychological defense mechanisms among the players of the Nineveh Governorate football clubs (youth category), who represent an important segment in the football sports community. This study is considered a scientific addition in the field of sports psychology and may fill the gap in studies that dealt with psychological defense mechanisms with variables of positive personality forces, which constitutes a step towards conducting other research in sports institutions and clubs for other categories of athletes. In addition, it is important to identify the nature of the relationship between the positive personality forces and the psychological defense mechanisms under study.

1.2 Research problem

The psychological aspects hold considerable importance in an individual's life, as they contribute to significant differences in achievement and performance across all domains, particularly in competitive sports for athletes. Emotional responses necessitate that athletes possess both positive strengths and effective psychological defense

mechanisms. The absence of these crucial concepts can lead to diminished athletic achievement and suboptimal performance. Football, being a highly competitive sport rather than merely an entertaining game, frequently elicits emotional responses and situations that demand players to possess robust personal positive strengths. These strengths are essential for controlling and managing psychological pressures, emotions, challenges, and various situations encountered during training sessions and competitions. Furthermore, these attributes instill optimism in players and foster a commitment to training, which is a fundamental component in enhancing a player's overall skill level. Therefore, the research problem is centered on identifying the levels of positive personality strengths and psychological defense mechanisms, and elucidating the nature of the relationship between positive personality strengths and psychological defense mechanisms among football players.

1.3 Research objectives

This study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- To construct a valid and reliable scale for psychological defense mechanisms specifically tailored for youth football players in Nineveh Governorate clubs.
- To determine the levels of positive personality strengths and psychological defense mechanisms among youth football players in Nineveh Governorate clubs.
- To investigate the correlational relationship between positive personality strengths and psychological defense mechanisms among youth football players in Nineveh Governorate clubs.

1.4 Research hypothesis

Based on the research problem and objectives, the following hypothesis was formulated:

- There is a statistically significant correlation between positive personality strengths and psychological defense mechanisms among youth football players in Nineveh Governorate clubs.

1.5 Research fields

The scope of this research encompassed the following fields:

- Human field: Youth football players affiliated with clubs in Nineveh Governorate during the 2024-2025 sports season.
- Temporal field: The study was conducted from February 23, 2025, to July 5, 2025.
- Spatial field: The research was carried out in the sports stadiums associated with various sports clubs within Nineveh Governorate.

1.6 Definition of terms

Positive personality strengths

Defined by (Al-Ma'mari, 2010) as: "Resilience in facing pressures, surprises, and difficulties of life, and also the human methods of overcoming obstacles, achieving victory over difficulties, or getting out of crises and stressful situations." (Al-Ma'mari, 2010, 119). Procedural Definition: The researcher defines positive strengths of personality as the score obtained by the player when answering the items of the positive strengths of personality scale.

Psychological defense mechanisms

Defined by (Al-Abdali, 2021) as: "Unconscious or involuntary procedures taken by the individual to protect himself from anxiety, psychological pressures, and emotions." (Al-Abdali, 2021, 126). Procedural Definition: The researcher defines psychological defense mechanisms as the score obtained by the player through answering the items of the psychological defense mechanisms scale.

2. Research methodology

2.1 Research community and sample Research community

The research community included football players (youth category) in Nineveh Governorate clubs for the 2024-2025 sports season, numbering 16 clubs, namely: Mosul, AlHadbaa, Nineveh, Rabia, Future Bright, Al-Fata, Sahel Nineveh, Sinjar, Al-Shawq, Adaya Tish, Nineveh Works, Al-Gharq, Al-Riyadi Al-Amwaj, and Mosul Municipality. The Al-Jawiya Al-Suqoor club was excluded because it is a specialized club, and the Al-Fata club is a women's club, so the number of approved clubs registered within the clubs became 14 clubs. Table (1) shows this.

Table 1. Shows the number of approved and excluded clubs in the research and their percentages

No	Club name	Number of players	Approved players	Percentage (%)
1	Al-Mosul	24	24	8.42%
2	Al-Hadbaa	24	24	8.79%
3	Nineveh	23	23	8.05%
4	Rabiaa	24	24	8.42%
5	Bright Future	24	24	8.79%
6	Al-Futuwa	22	22	8.05%
7	Nineveh Plain	21	21	7.69%
8	Sinjar	24	24	8.05%
9	Alqosh	23	23	8.42%
10	Eyad Sheet Club	24	24	8.79%
11	Nineveh Workers Club	22	22	8.05%
12	Qaraqosh	23	23	8.42%
13	Al-Amwaj Sports Club	24	24	8.42%
14	Mosul Municipality Club	25	25	15.9%
15	Al-Suqoor Air Club	-	-	-
16	Al-Fatat Club	-	-	-
Total		327	327	100%

Table 1 Distribution of the approved and excluded clubs in the study and their percentages

2.2 Research sample

The total research sample consisted of 300 players, randomly selected from the total research population, representing 91.74% of the population. Table (2) presents these details.

Construction sample

The scale construction sample consisted of 250 players, representing 83.33% of the total research sample. This group was divided into three sub-samples:

- Pilot study sample: 20 players

- Reliability testing sample: 30 players
- Discrimination sample: 200 players, distributed among 14 clubs randomly selected. Additionally, 13 players were excluded due to incomplete responses to the Psychological Defense Mechanisms Scale, leaving 187 players in the discrimination sample. Table (2) presents these details.

Application sample

The application sample of the scale consisted of 50 players, randomly selected from the total research sample, representing 16% of the total sample. Table (2) presents these details.

Table 2. Details of the construction and application samples

No	Club name	Pilot study sample	Discrimination sample	Excluded players	Reliability sample	Application sample	Total
1	Al-Mosul	2	14	2	1	5	24
2	Al-Hadbaa	2	11	1	2	4	20
3	Nineveh	1	13	-	2	4	20
4	Rabiah	1	15	-	3	5	24
5	Bright Future	1	15	1	2	5	24
6	Al-Futuwa	2	13	1	3	3	22
7	Nineveh Plain	1	13	2	2	4	22
8	Sinjar	1	13	1	2	3	20
9	Alqosh	2	12	-	3	3	20
10	Eyad Sheet Club	1	15	-	2	4	22
11	Nineveh Workers Club	1	13	1	2	3	20
12	Qaraqosh	2	12	2	2	2	20
13	Al-Amwaj Sports Club	2	15	-	2	3	22
14	Mosul Municipality Club	1	13	2	2	2	20
Total		20	187	13	30	50	300

2.3 Data collection tools

The researcher used the following tools to achieve the research objectives:

- Analysis of the content of previous studies and scientific sources.
- The researcher used the questionnaire for data collection, as the current study required:

Methodology for constructing psychological scales

Due to the researcher's inability to obtain a suitable tool to measure psychological defense mechanisms in the sports field, specifically for football players in Iraqi environment and Nineveh Governorate clubs (youth category) to the best of the researcher's knowledge, in addition to the fact that relying on a ready-made tool designed for an environment different from the current study and for a different sample may give inaccurate

results. This difference is due to environmental, personal, and cultural factors for that community, and this is one of the requirements for constructing psychological scales, which is a reason that gives the researcher the right to construct the scale. Therefore, the researcher resorted to constructing a psychological defense mechanisms scale for football players in Nineveh Governorate clubs (youth category) in a way that suits the research sample. Therefore, the researcher had to follow the basic steps specified for constructing psychological scales, and that is by identifying the basic dimensions so that its items are comprehensive for the content of the measured characteristic, as (Allen & Yen, 1979) referred to, and (Al-Hayali, 2012) quoting from (Allen, 1977) and (Al-Ta'i, 2016, 62) that the process of constructing any scale goes through basic steps, which are:

- Planning for the scale by identifying the dimensions it covers.
- Formulating items for each dimension (axis).
- Applying the items to a representative sample of the research community.
- Conducting statistical analysis for the scale items (AlHayali, 2012, 49).

Steps for constructing the psychological defense mechanisms scale Identifying the axes of the psychological defense mechanisms scale

To identify the axes of the psychological defense mechanisms scale, the researcher reviewed the theoretical frameworks and previous scientific sources that dealt with the topic of psychological defense mechanisms and their employment in a way that serves the research, which are: (Al-Obaidi, 2005) study, (Attia, 2010) study, (Hashim and Abdul Rasool, 2018) study, and (Al-Eisawi, 2025) study. This helps the researcher in constructing the axes correctly and understanding the scale to be built to the greatest extent possible, and identifying the main axes for the scale. When reviewing and analyzing these studies, the researcher found that researchers have addressed many psychological defense mechanisms, as (Radwan, 2009) indicates that there are forty mechanisms since Freud until our present time. The researcher found that there is a great similarity in adopting the dimensions of the (Psychological Defense Mechanisms) scale. Then the researcher proposed nine axes for the psychological defense mechanisms scale, and then the proposed axes were presented to the experts to determine the most appropriate among them, and to add, modify, or delete axes as they deem appropriate and serve the research objectives. Table (3) shows the percentages of agreement of experts on the proposed axes.

Table 3. Percentages of agreement of experts and specialists on the proposed axes for the psychological defense mechanisms scale

No	Scale axes	Agree	Disagree	Agreement percentage
1	Rationalization	6	1	85.714%
2	Compensation	2	5	28.571%
3	Sublimation	3	4	42.857%
4	Negation	7	-	100%
5	Identification	7	-	100%
6	Projection	7	-	100%
7	Withdrawal	2	5	28.571%
8	Displacement	3	4	42.857%
9	Neuroticism	4	3	57.142%

Thus, the scale was summarized to four axes that obtained an agreement percentage of more than (75%), according to what (Bloom, 1983) referred to, that "it is possible to rely on the agreement of experts' opinions with a percentage of more than (75%) in this type of validity." The axes that obtained the required agreement percentage are: (Projection, Negation, Identification, Rationalization).

Formulating items

After the researcher finished the first step in constructing the psychological defense mechanisms scale, which included identifying the basic axes for the scale, based on previous studies and theoretical frameworks, in the second step of the construction process, a number of items were formulated for each of the four axes according to the content analysis of relevant scientific sources in a way that suits the research community and its sample. A number of items were developed, which consisted of (45) items, and the items were distributed among the four axes of the scale (Rationalization, Projection, Negation, Identification). The items for each axis were (11), (10), (12), and (12) respectively. The following basic aspects were taken into account in formulating the items:

- The item should be understandable to the respondent.
- The item should be short and concise and indicate a single meaning.
- Avoid repetition in items.
- The item should be free of linguistic errors.
- The item should measure a single behavior or goal. As for the method of answering the scale, the researcher adopted the five-point Likert scale, based on the opinions of experts. Thus, the alternatives for answering the scale items became: (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) and their degrees are (5, 4, 3, 2, 1) respectively. Table (4) shows the axes and the number of items in them.

Table 4. Number of proposed items for the psychological defense mechanisms scale

S. No.	Axes	Number of items
1	Rationalization	11
2	Projection	10
3	Negation	12
4	Identification	12

After taking the opinions of experts and specialists regarding the axes, items, and method of answering and their degrees, the researcher prepared the initial form of the scale.

Validity of the psychological defense mechanisms scale

After taking the opinions of experts and specialists regarding the axes, items, and method of answering and their degrees, the researcher prepared the initial form of the scale. In order for the researcher to be able to use the scale, it is necessary for the scale to be subject to scientific treatments. The researcher presented the scale to a group of experts to identify the face validity for the purpose of judging the extent to which the items are suitable for the axis in which they were placed and their suitability for measuring psychological defense mechanisms, in addition to taking what they deem appropriate through modification, merging, or adding items. This procedure is considered appropriate to confirm the validity, and after analyzing the experts' responses, a number of items were modified to suit the research topic, then the percentage of experts' agreement on the validity of the scale items was found, as

items that were agreed upon by more than (75%) were accepted, as (Bloom, 1983) stated that "it is possible for the researcher to obtain a percentage of agreement of experts' opinions of more than (75%) in this type of validity." Therefore, all scale items obtained an agreement percentage of experts of more than (75%) on their validity. With this procedure, the number of scale items becomes (45).

*Names of experts and specialists in the field University College

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Exploratory experiment

The researcher applied the initial form of the scale, which consists of (45) items, to a sample of (20) players representing the youth of Al-Mosul club, Al-Amwaj Al-Riyadi club, Nineveh Works club, and Future Bright club, with (5) players from each club, who were excluded from the hypothetical construction sample. The purpose of conducting the exploratory experiment is to verify the following:

- The extent of suitability and clarity of the scale items and the answer to the questions for the players, if any.

The results of applying the exploratory experiment revealed the following:

- Suitability and clarity of the items for the respondents. Thus, the initial form of the psychological defense mechanisms scale for football players (youth category) was prepared and distributed to the individuals of the construction sample.

Statistical analysis of the psychological defense mechanisms scale items

Knowing the scale's ability to distinguish between individuals who obtain high scores and those who obtain low scores is done by conducting a statistical analysis of the scale items, which means extracting the discriminatory power of the items, which is considered one of the specifications of a good scale that helps in knowing the extent of differences in performance between individuals in the measured trait. In addition to the researcher's confirmation of the internal and external validity of the scale, and also verifying the internal consistency by calculating the correlation coefficient between the score of each item and the total score of the scale. The researcher applied the psychological defense mechanisms scale to the construction sample (statistical analysis), which amounted to (187) players, by distributing the questionnaire to the players (construction sample) and asking them to answer the scale and provide assistance. After obtaining the answers, they were statistically processed to find the following:

Extreme groups method

One of the objectives of analyzing the scale items is to confirm its efficiency in achieving the principle of individual differences on which the scale is based. The discriminatory power of the items is estimated for the purpose of retaining the distinctive items and excluding the non-distinctive ones. The size of the discrimination sample reached (187) players. After completing the preparation of the special instructions and applying the scale to the discrimination sample, and after collecting the questionnaires from the sample, the score for each item of the scale was obtained to calculate a total score for each questionnaire, and then the players' scores were arranged in descending order (from largest to smallest) based on the total score. Based on what the sources referred to regarding determining the size of the upper and lower groups, which basically depend on the sample size, (27%) of the high scores were selected, and (27%) of the low scores, with (51) players for each group, representing the two extreme groups. The researcher conducted the t-test between the two extreme groups to know the difference between them. The researcher relied on the statistically significant (t) value as an indicator for distinguishing the items shown in Table (5).

Table 5: Shows the discriminatory power for the psychological defense mechanisms scale items according to the extreme groups method

Item No.	Item	Mean (Upper group)	Std. Dev. (Upper group)	Mean (Lower group)	Std. Dev. (Lower group)	t-value	Sig.	Discriminatory power
1	Rationalization	4.37	0.78	3.68	1.31	2.86	0.000	Distinctive
2		4.48	0.86	3.64	1.17	4.01	0.000	Distinctive
3		3.77	0.93	2.53	1.15	5.25	0.000	Distinctive
4		3.31	0.63	2.26	1.07	3.89	0.000	Distinctive
5		4.36	0.30	4.73	0.44	9.43	0.160	Non-Distinctive
6		4.17	0.73	3.17	1.11	4.82	0.000	Distinctive
7		4.48	0.68	3.40	1.05	6.15	0.000	Distinctive
8		4.17	0.77	3.24	1.00	5.00	0.080	Non-Distinctive
9		4.11	0.61	3.13	1.03	5.29	0.000	Distinctive
10		3.31	0.63	2.26	1.07	3.89	0.000	Distinctive
11		1.71	0.70	1.77	0.33	0.62	0.700	Non-Distinctive
12		4.42	0.92	3.60	0.91	5.29	0.000	Distinctive
13		4.37	0.97	3.35	0.98	5.82	0.000	Distinctive

14	Projection	4.28	0.88	3.37	0.91	5.63	0.00	Distinctive
15		4.22	0.92	3.13	0.91	6.10	0.07	Non-Distinctive
16		4.55	0.55	2.97	1.01	9.37	0.00	Distinctive
17		4.40	0.90	3.13	1.17	6.00	0.00	Distinctive
18		3.53	0.73	2.35	1.06	4.87	0.00	Distinctive
19		4.08	0.88	2.75	1.11	6.89	0.00	Distinctive
20		3.35	0.51	2.42	0.89	4.30	0.00	Distinctive
21		4.35	0.85	3.24	1.14	5.66	0.00	Distinctive
22		4.13	0.83	2.86	1.12	5.99	0.00	Distinctive

23		2.71	0.70	1.78	0.33	0.74	0.740	Non-Distinctive
24		3.37	0.77	2.24	0.93	5.12	0.000	Distinctive
25		4.28	0.88	2.93	1.09	7.65	0.000	Distinctive
26	Negation	3.75	0.75	2.53	0.81	7.43	0.000	Distinctive
27		4.22	0.82	2.84	1.10	6.78	0.000	Distinctive
28		4.51	0.81	3.40	1.09	5.99	0.000	Distinctive
29		4.35	0.85	3.11	1.00	7.48	0.000	Distinctive
30		4.20	0.60	3.22	0.97	5.39	0.000	Distinctive
31		3.77	0.66	2.87	1.65	4.67	0.000	Distinctive
32		1.97	0.98	1.98	0.65	1.21	0.070	Non-Distinctive
33		3.12	0.33	1.76	0.34	1.76	0.000	Distinctive
34	Identification	2.42	0.73	2.15	1.40	0.16	0.340	Non-Distinctive
35		3.17	0.70	2.68	0.99	2.49	0.015	Distinctive
36		3.64	0.74	2.46	0.89	6.68	0.000	Distinctive
37		3.04	0.84	2.35	0.88	3.60	0.001	Distinctive
38		1.88	0.78	1.68	0.63	1.11	0.260	Non-Distinctive
39		2.82	0.72	2.24	0.95	2.56	0.012	Distinctive
40		2.91	0.71	2.44	0.78	2.40	0.018	Distinctive
41		2.51	1.11	2.33	1.04	0.82	0.410	Non-Distinctive
42		3.65	0.74	2.98	0.75	3.82	0.000	Distinctive
43		1.87	0.56	1.34	1.33	1.76	0.000	Distinctive
44		2.66	0.66	3.54	0.67	1.98	0.092	Non-Distinctive
45		2.65	0.73	2.98	0.76	2.66	0.005	Distinctive

*Significant if Sig. value is < 0.05

It is clear from Table (5) that the calculated (t) values ranged between (-9.437 - 0.334) and the (Sig) values ranged between (0.000 - 0.740). Thus, the number of non-distinctive scale items is (10) items that obtained a significance level greater than (0.05), which are: (items 5, 8, 11 from the Rationalization axis), (item 15 from the Projection axis), (items 23, 32 from the Negation axis), and (items 34, 38, 41, 44 from the Identification axis). The remaining (35) items obtained a significance level less than (0.05), which means they possess the ability to distinguish.

Table 6. Shows the values of correlation coefficients of the psychological defense mechanisms scale items with the total score

Item No.	R value	Sig.	Item No.	R value	Sig.	Item No.	R value	Sig.
1	0.442	0.000	18	0.475	0.000	35	0.660	0.000
2	0.592	0.000	19	0.554	0.000	36	0.510	0.000
3	0.437	0.000	20	0.454	0.000	37	0.560	0.000
4	0.269	0.029	21	0.630	0.000	38	Deleted by discrimination	
5	Deleted by discrimination	0.22	22	0.436	0.000	39	0.550	0.000

6	0.569	0.000	23	Deleted by discrimination	40	0.430	0.000	
7	0.471	0.000	24	0.471	0.000	41	Deleted by discrimination	
8	Deleted by discrimination	25	0.593	0.000	42	0.510	0.000	
9	0.331	0.000	26	0.472	0.000	43	0.530	0.000
10	0.554	0.000	27	0.554	0.000	44	Deleted by discrimination	
11	0.250	0.005	28	0.494	0.000	45	0.250	0.005
12	0.300	0.000	29	0.530	0.000			
13	0.652	0.000	30	0.510	0.000			
14	0.460	0.000	31	0.610	0.000			
15	Deleted by discrimination	32	Deleted by discrimination					
16	0.710	0.000	33	0.660	0.000			
17	0.591	0.000	34	Deleted by discrimination				

It is clear from Table (6) that the values of the correlation coefficients between the scale items and the total score of the scale ranged between (0.029 - 0.710) at a degree of freedom (185) and a significance level of (0.05). By relying on the significance level (Sig), where the (Sig) value ranged between (0.000 - 0.005), which is less than the adopted significance level (0.05), we note that all items were internally consistent.

Scale reliability

To obtain the reliability of the scale, the researcher used the (split-half) method (odd and even items), where the reliability sample was divided into two halves. The first half represents the items with odd serial numbers, and the second half represents the items with even serial numbers, so that each individual has two scores (odd and even). The simple correlation coefficient was used between the scores of the two halves of the scale, and the calculated (R) value was (0.87). To obtain an unbiased estimate of the reliability of the entire scale, the (Brown-Spearman) equation was used, where the value of the total reliability coefficient reached (0.92), which is statistically significant, indicating the reliability of the scale.

Description of the psychological defense mechanisms scale in its final form

After the researcher completed the previous steps for constructing the psychological defense mechanisms scale, the scale became ready in its final form for final application to the application sample. The scale consists of (35) items distributed over four axes. The answer to the scale is by choosing one alternative from five alternatives, which are: (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree), and their degrees are (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) respectively. The score for the scale ranges between (35-175)*. The hypothetical average for the scale is (105).

2.2 Positive strengths of personality scale Face validity of the scale

To obtain the validity of the scale, the scale was presented to a number of experts in the field of

sports sciences, educational sciences, and psychological sciences. After collecting the questionnaires, the agreement of the experts on the scale items was (100%), with taking into account their modifications and observations regarding some items to be more suitable, clearer, and easier to understand for the individuals of the research sample.

Scale reliability

To obtain the reliability of the scale, the researcher used the (split-half) method (odd and even items), where the reliability sample was divided into two halves. The first half represents the items with odd serial numbers, and the second half represents the items with even serial numbers, so that each individual has two scores (odd and even). The simple correlation coefficient was used between the scores of the two halves of the scale, and the calculated (R) value was (0.85). To obtain an unbiased estimate of the reliability of the entire scale, the (Brown-Spearman) equation was used, where the value of the total reliability coefficient reached (0.90), which is statistically significant, indicating the reliability of the scale.

Description and correction of the scale

The positive strengths scale, supported by (Al-Hayali, 2012), which included (64) items formulated positively, distributed over six dimensions, which are: (Wisdom and Knowledge (12 items), Courage (11 items), Humanity (8 items), Justice (10 items), Forgiveness (11 items), Transcendence (12 items)). The answer to the items is according to the five-point Likert scale: (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). The appropriate weight for each response was determined, which ranges between (1-5) in descending order on the scale, and the opposite for negative items. The maximum value is 320, and the minimum value is 64. The hypothetical average for the scale is (192).

2.3 Application of the two scales

The researcher applied the two scales of positive strengths of personality and psychological defense mechanisms to the application sample, which consisted of (50) players selected randomly from the main research sample. The method of answering the items of the two scales was explained and clarified to the players, by placing a (✓) mark in front of the alternative they deem appropriate for each item of the two scales, with an emphasis on answering all items of the two scales with clarity and accuracy. It is worth noting that the answer is on the same questionnaire form. Then the scale booklets were collected from the respondents and corrected. Thus, the score of the respondent on each scale is the sum of his scores on all items of the two scales.

2.3 Statistical methods

- 2.3.1 Arithmetic mean
- 2.3.2 Standard deviation
- 2.3.3 t-test for one sample
- 2.3.4 t-test for two independent samples
- 2.3.5 Brown-Spearman equation
- 2.3.6 Hypothetical average for the scale (Al-Alawi, 1998, 146).
- 2.3.7 Percentage (Omar and Kharkan, 2001, 88-90).

2.3.8 Pearson correlation coefficient.

3 Presentation, analysis, and discussion of results

The first objective, which is the construction of the psychological defense mechanisms scale, was achieved according to the scientific foundations for constructing psychological scales, then the application of the two scales (Positive Strengths of Personality and Psychological Defense Mechanisms) to the application sample. The researcher obtained the data and statistically processed it. Therefore, the researcher will present and discuss the results.

3.3 Presentation of the results of the research sample in the two scales (positive strengths of personality and psychological defense mechanisms)

To identify the level of positive strengths of personality and psychological defense mechanisms among the research sample, the researcher calculated the hypothetical average for the two scales and compared it with the arithmetic mean for them. Table (7) shows this.

Table 7: Shows the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and hypothetical mean, and the calculated (t) value for the research sample in the two scales of positive strengths of personality and psychological defense mechanisms

Scale	Statistical sample	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Hypothetical mean	t-value	Sig.
Positive strengths of personality	50	200.13	7.87	192	8.12	0.000
Psychological defense mechanisms	50	102.36	8.68	105	9.46	0.000

*Significant at 0.05 significance level

It is clear from Table (6) that the value of the arithmetic mean of the research sample's responses to the items of the two scales (Positive Strengths of Personality and Psychological Defense Mechanisms) reached (200.13) with a standard deviation of (± 7.87) for the Positive Strengths of Personality scale, and (102.36) with a standard deviation of (± 8.68) for the Psychological Defense Mechanisms scale. When testing the significance of the differences between the average scores of the sample, the hypothetical average for the two scales (*192) and (*105), and using the significance level (Sig), where the (Sig) value ranged between (0.000, 0.005), which is less than the adopted significance level

(0.05), which indicates that the difference is significant and in favor of the arithmetic mean for the scale.

The results showed that football players (youth category) in Nineveh Governorate clubs generally possess a level of positive strengths above the hypothetical average, while in the psychological defense mechanisms scale, the value was less than the hypothetical average for the scale.

The researcher attributes these findings to the fact that the study sample consists of football players from the sports environment who embody the athletic personality characterized by numerous positive psychological traits. Athletes in general, and youth athletes in particular, tend to demonstrate positive personal qualities and strengths in pursuit of their goals, especially at the beginning of their sports careers when striving for peak athletic achievement. This aligns with the humanistic perspective that views human behavior as purposeful in controlling one's environment and establishing one's position within it - in this case, the sports environment. These results are consistent with the unique nature of football as a contact sport requiring direct competition, which necessitates that players possess positive personality traits. These traits represent key factors for athletic success as they enhance determination, help overcome obstacles, and achieve both personal and team objectives - including courage, perseverance, wisdom, and other positive personality strengths that form the foundation of a well-adjusted personality. Such traits enable players to think and behave more positively, modify their behaviors and emotions, overcome challenges, and adapt to their surroundings to achieve their goals.

As Rankin et al. (2004) cited in (Bakhsh & Al-Kaki, 2016, p. 86) notes: "Individuals with positive personality strengths demonstrate greater ability to recognize and authentically express their emotions in ways consistent with their inclinations and thoughts. They exhibit awareness of their emotional states and maintain positive thinking patterns and behaviors. They persist through discouraging situations, develop independent personalities, and demonstrate enhanced decision-making capabilities - all contributing to superior personal and emotional adjustment."

Regarding defense mechanisms, the study sample scored below the hypothetical mean on the psychological defense mechanisms scale, indicating limited use of such mechanisms. This reflects their positive self-concept regarding performance responsibilities and represents an aspect of psychological adaptation. However, excessive use of defense mechanisms can jeopardize mental and physical health, while moderate use remains necessary for social functioning. The researcher explains this finding in light of the significant challenges and conflicts these players face, which likely fostered strong psychological capacities enabling them to confront difficulties without resorting to defensive mechanisms in interactions with coaches and peers during competitions. This aligns with Shawqi Yusuf Bahnam's (2001, p. 23) observation that "defense mechanisms are employed by the ego when perceiving threat, utilizing defensive strategies to counter internal and external dangers to psychological stability. These mechanisms constitute response patterns through which individuals modify their psychological makeup or external environment to achieve necessary harmony, satisfy needs, and meet social, familial, and psychological demands."

3.2 Presentation and discussion of results examining the relationship between positive personality strengths and psychological defense mechanisms among youth

football players in Nineveh Governorate Clubs

Table 8: Displays the means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficient for the study sample on the positive personality strengths and psychological defense mechanisms scales

Statistical Measures	Variables	Sample	Mean	SD	r-value	Sig.
Positive personality strengths	50	200.13	7.87	-0.429*	0.004	
Psychological defense mechanisms		102.36	8.68			

*Significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 8 reveals that the mean scores for positive personality strengths (200.13 ± 7.87) and psychological defense mechanisms (102.36 ± 8.68) show a significant inverse correlation ($r = -0.429$, $p = 0.004$). This indicates that increased reliance on defense mechanisms corresponds with decreased positive personality strengths, and vice versa. The researcher attributes this to defense mechanisms often involving attribution of negative qualities or intentions to others, potentially justifying aggressive thoughts or behaviors toward them. While this negative relationship may reduce conflict and anxiety while preventing frustration, it often comes at the expense of clear self-perception and self-worth (Ahmed, 2010, p. 65; Luthans, 2008, p. 123).

As explains, this inverse relationship reflects how diminished capacity to confront and overcome difficult situations - increased negativity - corresponds with reduced self-concept and consequently weaker positive personality strengths. Psychological defense mechanisms represent unconscious processes employed when facing overwhelming situations, potentially leading to feelings of failure. This sometimes manifests as regression to immature behavioral patterns when confronting problems. Thus, excessive dependence on defense mechanisms - particularly negative, justificatory, projective, or identificatory ones - correlates with impaired self-assessment. As challenge management becomes more difficult and negativity increases, positive personality strengths decrease.

Zahran (1997, p. 65) notes that most individuals employ defense mechanisms for self-protection, helping manage conflicts and frustrations by reducing anxiety when confronting threatening information. This finding aligns with research showing that youth frequently modify behaviors through defense mechanisms, sometimes resorting to neurotic, immature defenses like justification, projection, identification, and negativity. This pattern reflects the pressures, traumas, socialization processes, familial influences, financial constraints, and responsibility challenges youth face during athletic competitions.

4 Conclusions

- Football players in Nineveh Governorate clubs (youth category) generally possess positive strengths of personality above the hypothetical average.
- Football players in Nineveh Governorate clubs (youth category) generally possess psychological defense mechanisms below the hypothetical average.
- There is a statistically significant inverse correlation between positive strengths of personality and psychological defense mechanisms among football players in Nineveh Governorate clubs (youth category).

5 Recommendations

- Activating the process of scientific research in the field of positive strengths of personality and psychological defense mechanisms and their implications for the overall sports activities of Nineveh Governorate clubs.
- Conducting experimental research to enhance the positive strengths of personality and reduce psychological defense mechanisms among players in the governorate's clubs.
- Emphasizing the importance of developing positive strengths of personality among football players, as they contribute to improving their athletic performance and dealing with psychological pressures.
- Providing psychological support programs for football players to help them deal with psychological defense mechanisms in a healthy and constructive way.
- Conducting similar studies on other age groups and other sports to generalize the results and identify the extent of their applicability.

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