

Psychological and Socio-Economic Predictors of Athlete Retention in Kenyan Track and Field

Nancy Wanjiru Maina¹; Simon Peter Munayi²; Kehinde Lateef³ and Ashley Kaphinde⁴

¹Pan African University, Life and Earth Sciences Institute (PAULESI), University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

²Department of Physical Education and Sport, University of Nairobi, Kenya. ³Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria. ⁴Department of Sports Science, Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST), Malawi.

Corresponding author: Shiromaina94@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examined psychological and socio-economic predictors of athlete retention in Kenyan track and field. Anchored in Self-Determination Theory and the Social-Ecological Model, the study assessed how motivation, confidence, mental toughness, financial reward, sponsorship, and family support influence athlete retention. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and data were collected from 230 track and field athletes using a structured questionnaire. Data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression at the 0.05 level of significance. Correlation results showed that mental toughness had a weak but significant positive relationship with athlete retention ($r = .152$, $p = .021$), while motivation ($r = -.065$, $p = .323$) and confidence ($r = -.014$, $p = .827$) were not significant. Financial reward ($r = .153$, $p = .020$) and sponsorship ($r = .195$, $p = .003$) were significantly and positively related to athlete retention, while family support was not significant ($r = .101$, $p = .101$). Regression results showed that psychological factors did not jointly predict athlete retention, $F(3, 226) = 2.204$, $p = .088$, $R^2 = .028$, although mental toughness had a significant relative effect ($\beta = .149$, $p = .024$). Socio-economic factors jointly predicted athlete retention, $F(3, 226) = 4.187$, $p = .007$, $R^2 = .053$, with sponsorship emerging as the only significant relative predictor ($\beta = .156$, $p = .026$). The composite model was also significant, $F(2, 227) = 6.717$, $p = .001$, $R^2 = .056$. The study recommends strengthening sponsorship systems and integrating resilience-focused interventions into athlete development programmes.

Keywords: Athlete Retention, Psychological Factors, Socio-Economic Factors, Mental Toughness, Track and Field.

Introduction

Sport continues to play a central role in human development, extending beyond physical performance to encompass psychological well-being, social cohesion, and economic opportunity. In modern sport systems, success is increasingly evaluated not only by elite performance outcomes but also by the ability to sustain athlete participation over time (Coakley, 2017). This has shifted attention toward athlete continuity as a critical dimension of sport development, reflecting the capacity of systems to retain and develop talent across stages. Sustained engagement in sport is shaped by a complex interaction of internal

psychological processes and external environmental conditions, rather than being solely dependent on performance ability (Kovács, 2025). Athletes operate within dynamic contexts where motivation, identity, and resilience are continuously influenced by social structures and lived experiences, reinforcing the multidimensional nature of long-term participation (Ronkainen et al., 2019).

Within competitive athletics, particularly track and field, maintaining athlete continuity presents distinct structural and psychological challenges. The sport is characterized by high training intensity, individualized performance demands, and constant evaluation through competition outcomes. Athletes must sustain performance progression while managing pressures such as injury, burnout, and performance anxiety, all of which can disrupt continued participation (Weinberg & Gould, 2023). Psychological resources such as motivation and confidence are often viewed as essential for sustained engagement, yet their effectiveness depends on how athletes respond to adversity and competitive stress (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). Additionally, career transitions especially from junior to senior levels introduce uncertainty that can significantly influence participation trajectories (Stambulova et al., 2009). These dynamics indicate that athlete continuity in athletics is not determined by psychological strength alone but is shaped by the interaction between internal capacities and external support systems.

The Kenyan track and field context provides a critical setting for examining these dynamics due to its global dominance in middle- and long-distance running. Kenya's success has been attributed to environmental advantages such as high-altitude training conditions and strong cultural traditions that support early engagement in athletics (Onywera et al., 2006). At the same time, athletics functions as a pathway for socio-economic mobility, with many athletes pursuing the sport as a means of improving their livelihoods (Mair & Smith, 2022). Despite these strengths, challenges persist in sustaining athlete participation across developmental stages. While grassroots participation remains high, a notable proportion of athletes fail to transition effectively into elite competition, leading to discontinuity within the system. This situation is influenced by factors such as financial instability, limited institutional support, and increasing performance demands, which collectively shape athletes' decisions to persist or withdraw from the sport (Mthombeni, 2022).

Despite growing scholarly attention to athlete participation, existing research remains fragmented in its treatment of psychological and socio-economic influences. Many studies examine psychological constructs such as motivation and confidence in isolation, without adequately accounting for the contextual conditions that shape their effectiveness (Gould & Carson, 2008). Furthermore, empirical findings on these variables are often inconsistent, with some studies reporting significant relationships while others show weak or non-significant effects (Eime et al., 2013). This inconsistency suggests that psychological factors may not operate uniformly across different socio-economic environments. In addition, much of the literature remains descriptive, limiting its ability to explain how and why athlete continuity is sustained or disrupted within real-world settings (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Consequently, there is a clear gap in understanding the combined and relative

influence of psychological and socio-economic factors within a unified analytical framework, particularly in developing sport systems such as Kenya.

Addressing this gap requires an integrated analytical approach that considers both psychological and socio-economic dimensions of athlete development. The present study responds to this need by examining motivation, confidence, and mental toughness alongside financial reward, sponsorship, and family support as predictors of athlete continuity in Kenyan track and field. By focusing on both relational and predictive dimensions, the study moves beyond isolated analysis to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these factors interact within a real-world sporting context. This approach allows for the identification of key drivers of sustained engagement as well as the relative importance of different variables within the athlete development process.

The significance of this study lies in its ability to bridge the gap between theoretical assumptions and practical realities in athlete development. By empirically examining the combined effects of psychological and socio-economic factors, the study provides evidence that can inform targeted interventions aimed at improving athlete continuity. The findings are expected to support policy development, coaching strategies, and resource allocation within sport systems, particularly in contexts where structural constraints influence athlete experiences. Furthermore, by clarifying the relative and joint contributions of these factors, the study contributes to a more nuanced theoretical understanding of athlete continuity, offering insights into how sustained participation is shaped within complex and resource-constrained sporting environments.

Problem Statement

Athlete continuity remains a critical challenge in track and field athletics, particularly in contexts where strong talent pipelines do not consistently translate into sustained elite participation. In Kenya, despite global success and high levels of grassroots engagement, a substantial proportion of athletes fail to progress effectively from developmental to elite stages. This discontinuity reflects a structural inefficiency within the sport system, where early talent identification is not matched by long-term athlete support and retention mechanisms. As a result, the system experiences a loss of potential elite performers, which undermines both competitive sustainability and the efficient utilization of athletic talent.

Existing approaches to understanding this problem have largely focused on isolated factors, such as psychological attributes or socio-economic constraints, without adequately examining how these variables interact within real-world contexts. Psychological constructs such as motivation and confidence are widely assumed to drive sustained participation, yet empirical findings remain inconsistent, with some studies reporting limited or non-significant effects. At the same time, socio-economic factors such as financial support and sponsorship are recognized as critical enablers of athletic careers, but their relative influence compared to psychological factors is not clearly established. This fragmented approach limits the ability to develop comprehensive and context-specific interventions that address the underlying causes of athlete discontinuity.

Furthermore, much of the existing literature is descriptive in nature, emphasizing general participation trends rather than providing analytical explanations of the determinants of sustained engagement. This creates a gap in empirical evidence regarding the predictive capacity of key variables and their combined influence on athlete continuity. Without such evidence, sport development policies and athlete support programmes risk being based on assumptions rather than data-driven insights, reducing their effectiveness in addressing the problem.

Therefore, the central problem addressed in this study is the lack of integrated empirical understanding of how psychological and socio-economic factors jointly and relatively influence athlete continuity in Kenyan track and field. By examining these variables within a unified analytical framework, the study seeks to identify the key determinants of sustained participation and provide evidence that can inform more targeted and effective strategies for athlete development.

Research Questions

1. What is the joint influence of psychological factors (motivation, confidence, and mental toughness) on athlete retention in Kenyan track and field?
2. What is the relative influence of motivation, confidence, and mental toughness on athlete retention in Kenyan track and field?
3. What is the joint influence of socio-economic factors (financial reward, sponsorship, and family support) on athlete retention in Kenyan track and field?
4. What is the relative influence of financial reward, sponsorship, and family support on athlete retention in Kenyan track and field?
5. What is the composite influence of psychological and socio-economic factors on athlete retention in Kenyan track and field?

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant joint prediction of psychological factors (motivation, confidence, and mental toughness) on athlete retention in Kenyan track and field.

H₀₂: There is no significant relative prediction of motivation, confidence, and mental toughness on athlete retention in Kenyan track and field.

H₀₃: There is no significant joint prediction of socio-economic factors (financial reward, sponsorship, and family support) on athlete retention in Kenyan track and field.

H₀₄: There is no significant relative prediction of financial reward, sponsorship, and family support on athlete retention in Kenyan track and field.

H₀₅: There is no significant composite prediction of psychological and socio-economic factors on athlete retention in Kenyan track and field.

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

Self-Determination Theory and Motivational Regulation in Athlete Participation

Self-Determination Theory provides a critical lens for understanding how motivation shapes sustained engagement in sport. The theory posits that human behaviour is influenced by the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which collectively determine the quality and persistence of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In athletic settings, autonomy reflects the extent to which athletes feel control over their training and career decisions, while competence relates to their perception of skill development and performance capability (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Relatedness, on the other hand, captures the sense of belonging and connection athletes experience within their sporting environment, particularly through relationships with coaches, teammates, and support networks (Ntoumanis, 2012).

When these needs are adequately satisfied, athletes are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation, which is associated with sustained participation, psychological well-being, and long-term commitment to sport (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, when participation is driven primarily by extrinsic factors such as financial rewards or external pressure, motivation may become unstable and contingent on external conditions (Deci & Ryan, 2008). This distinction is particularly important in competitive athletics, where athletes often operate in environments that simultaneously promote intrinsic enjoyment and extrinsic incentives. The interaction between these motivational orientations can influence not only performance outcomes but also decisions related to continued participation or withdrawal from the sport (Ntoumanis, 2012).

Importantly, Self-Determination Theory also highlights that motivation does not function in isolation but is shaped by contextual and environmental factors. Supportive environments that foster autonomy, provide constructive feedback, and promote meaningful social connections enhance intrinsic motivation, whereas controlling or resource-constrained environments may undermine it (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In contexts such as Kenyan athletics, where socio-economic pressures and structural limitations are prevalent, the satisfaction of these psychological needs may be constrained, thereby affecting the stability of athlete engagement. This suggests that motivation alone may not be sufficient to sustain participation unless it is supported by enabling environmental conditions, reinforcing the need to examine psychological and socio-economic factors together within a unified framework (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ntoumanis, 2012).

Social-Ecological Model and Multi-Level Influences on Athlete Continuity

The Social-Ecological Model provides a broader framework for understanding how multiple layers of influence shape athlete participation and continuity. This model conceptualizes behaviour as the result of interactions between individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy-level factors, rather than as an outcome of isolated individual characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). At the individual level, psychological attributes such

as motivation, resilience, and self-efficacy influence how athletes engage with the demands of sport (McLeroy et al., 1988). However, these individual factors are embedded within interpersonal relationships, where family support, coaching quality, and peer interactions play a critical role in reinforcing or constraining participation (Golden & Earp, 2012).

At the organizational level, access to training facilities, structured development programs, and competitive opportunities determines the conditions under which athletes can progress within the sport system (McLeroy et al., 1988). Community and societal influences further shape participation through cultural norms, social expectations, and the availability of local support structures, all of which can either encourage or discourage sustained engagement (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). At the policy level, national investment in sport, funding mechanisms, and institutional frameworks influence resource allocation and the overall functioning of the sport system (Golden & Earp, 2012).

The relevance of the Social-Ecological Model to athlete continuity lies in its emphasis on the interaction between these levels of influence. Athlete participation is not determined solely by internal psychological factors but is significantly shaped by the broader environment in which athletes operate. In resource-constrained contexts, structural limitations such as inadequate funding, limited sponsorship opportunities, and unequal access to facilities may override individual motivation and capacity. This multi-level perspective underscores the importance of examining both psychological and socio-economic factors simultaneously, as their interaction ultimately determines the sustainability of athlete engagement within competitive sport systems (McLeroy et al., 1988; Golden & Earp, 2012).

Empirical Review

Psychological Resources and Sustained Sporting Engagement

Psychological resources have long been considered central to understanding sustained engagement in competitive sport, particularly in high-demand disciplines such as track and field. Motivation, especially when intrinsically oriented, has been associated with persistence and long-term commitment, as athletes who derive internal satisfaction from participation are more likely to remain engaged despite challenges (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, in competitive environments, motivation is often influenced by external rewards and pressures, which can alter its stability and impact on sustained participation (Ntoumanis, 2012). Confidence also plays a critical role by shaping how athletes perceive their ability to succeed, with higher self-efficacy linked to greater resilience and persistence in the face of setbacks (Bandura, 1997). In addition, confidence influences emotional regulation and performance consistency, particularly under competitive pressure where outcomes are uncertain (Weinberg & Gould, 2023).

Mental toughness has emerged as a particularly important construct in explaining how athletes sustain engagement in demanding environments. It reflects the capacity to cope with adversity, maintain focus, and persist under pressure, making it especially relevant in endurance-based sports such as track and field (Clough et al., 2002). Athletes with higher levels of mental toughness are better able to manage stress, recover from failure, and

maintain consistent training behaviour over time (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). More recent scholarship conceptualises resilience not simply as a stable personal trait but as a dynamic and individualised process through which athletes respond, adapt, and recover when exposed to sporting stressors (Den Hartigh et al., 2024). However, empirical findings indicate that psychological variables do not always exert consistent effects across contexts, as the influence of motivation and confidence can vary depending on environmental conditions and support systems (Weinberg & Gould, 2023). In resource-constrained settings, for instance, high motivation may not translate into sustained participation if structural barriers limit access to opportunities (Gould & Carson, 2008). Recent sport-persistence research similarly demonstrates that continued engagement is influenced by psychological, social, and environmental factors, although resilience, goal orientation, and other individual characteristics remain particularly important among competitive athletes (Kovács, 2025). Psychological resources must therefore be understood within a broader context in which their effectiveness is shaped by external conditions.

Economic Constraints, Incentives, and Participation Decisions

Economic conditions represent a significant external factor influencing athlete participation, particularly in contexts where sport is closely linked to livelihood opportunities. Financial constraints can limit access to training, equipment, recovery services, and competition, thereby affecting athletes' ability to sustain their involvement in sport (Wong & Trumper, 2002). In many developing sport systems, athletes are required to balance training with income-generating activities, which can reduce performance capacity and increase the likelihood of discontinuity (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Financial rewards function as both incentives and enabling mechanisms because they provide resources necessary for continued engagement while reinforcing the perceived value of participation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Recent evidence also suggests that adequate financial and material support can reduce pressures associated with training, travel, equipment, and competition participation, thereby creating more stable conditions for athletic development (Rahmani et al., 2024).

Sponsorship plays a critical role in shaping participation decisions by reducing financial pressure and providing access to improved training environments, equipment, recovery services, professional guidance, and competitive opportunities (Rahmani et al., 2024). Research involving early-career athletes further indicates that financial and material sponsorship may improve financial stability, access to training resources, competitive exposure, and the conditions necessary for progression from junior to professional sport (Procházka et al., 2024). Athletes who secure sponsorship are therefore more likely to sustain participation because they can focus on performance without carrying the full burden of economic uncertainty (De Bosscher et al., 2015). However, access to sponsorship is often uneven, with established elite athletes receiving disproportionate support while athletes at lower developmental levels struggle to secure resources (Wong & Trumper, 2002). This disparity creates structural inequalities within sport systems, where financially

constrained athletes may withdraw despite possessing the necessary talent and motivation (Rahmani et al., 2024).

Recent African evidence reinforces the structural importance of financial and institutional support. Former South African Olympians from historically disadvantaged areas identified inadequate financial support, limited facilities, equipment shortages, unreliable transport, and weak scientific and post-career support as major barriers to athletic progression (Mthombeni et al., 2023). National coaches working with elite athletes from similar backgrounds have also identified insufficient funding, weak athlete-retention systems, restricted competition access, and inadequate sport-science support as interconnected obstacles to international sporting success (Mthombeni et al., 2024). These findings show that sponsorship extends beyond direct monetary reward and can function as a structured support mechanism that connects athletes to facilities, equipment, competitions, expertise, and development pathways. Broader economic conditions therefore influence participation by shaping the overall availability and distribution of opportunities within the sport system (De Bosscher et al., 2015).

Relational Support Systems and Athlete Development Pathways

Relational support systems play a critical role in shaping athlete development and sustained participation by providing emotional, informational, and practical resources. Family support, in particular, remains important because families often provide financial assistance, encouragement, transport, guidance, and stability during periods of uncertainty. Research on parents of dual-career athletes shows that families play a significant role in helping athletes manage sporting and educational demands, although the quality of this support depends partly on communication and coordination among parents, coaches, and educational institutions (Tessitore et al., 2021). Athletes who receive consistent family support may therefore be better positioned to persist through challenges such as injury, poor performance, financial pressure, and sport–education transitions. Participation in sport is also associated with social benefits that can strengthen belonging and continued engagement, particularly when athletes experience supportive interpersonal environments (Eime et al., 2013). However, family influence can be complex because expectations regarding economic success, education, or alternative employment may create additional pressure that affects participation decisions (Coakley, 2017).

Coaches and peers also form an essential part of the relational environment, influencing athlete experiences through guidance, feedback, shared identity, and social interaction. Effective coaching has been linked to improved motivation, confidence, skill development, and performance consistency, all of which contribute to sustained engagement in sport (Weinberg & Gould, 2023). Positive peer relationships further enhance participation by fostering a sense of belonging and collective identity within the sporting environment (Carron et al., 2005). Recent evidence indicates that athletes with more adaptive motivational profiles tend to report higher well-being, lower burnout, and weaker intentions to withdraw from sport. Feeling valued within the sporting environment also appears to reinforce positive motivational experiences and continued participation (Saward

et al., 2024). At the same time, negative interactions, excessive control, social exclusion, or insufficient support can undermine confidence and reduce commitment, particularly in highly competitive settings where social comparison is prevalent (Ntoumanis, 2012). Relational support systems therefore do not operate uniformly but can either reinforce or constrain athlete development depending on the quality and nature of the relationships involved.

In structured sport systems, relational support extends beyond immediate social networks to include institutional actors such as sport organisations, sponsors, coaches, educational institutions, and development programmes. These structures provide formalised support mechanisms that facilitate athlete progression, including access to coaching, competitions, equipment, sport-science services, scholarships, and career guidance (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Evidence from former South African Olympians shows that scholarships, mentorship, coaching support, community involvement, peer networks, and access to domestic and international competition can facilitate athletic progression (Mthombeni et al., 2023). National coaches have similarly identified effective governance, sport policies, coaching provision, bursaries, competition access, and volunteer involvement as important enablers of elite sporting development (Mthombeni et al., 2024). In contexts where these systems are underdeveloped or unevenly distributed, athletes may experience gaps in support that interrupt their development pathways. Relational support should therefore be understood as both a social and structural phenomenon whose influence is shaped by interactions across multiple levels of the sport system.

Career Sustainability, Transition Pressures, and Dropout Risk in Athletics

Career sustainability in athletics is influenced by factors extending beyond immediate performance outcomes, particularly during critical transition phases such as the movement from junior to senior competition. These transitions often involve increased training demands, higher performance expectations, changing relationships, greater competition for resources, and increased exposure to performance pressure, all of which may affect decisions about continued participation (Stambulova et al., 2009). Athletes who are unable to navigate these transitions successfully may experience uncertainty, reduced commitment, and eventual discontinuity within their athletic careers (Wylleman, 2019). Recent career-transition scholarship has extended this explanation by connecting athletes' developmental experiences with the wider environments in which transitions occur. Successful progression therefore depends on the interaction between athletes' individual resources and the ecological support available within their families, teams, organisations, education systems, and communities (Stambulova & Henriksen, 2025).

Injury and burnout represent additional challenges affecting career sustainability, particularly in sports characterised by high physical and psychological demands. Repeated exposure to intensive training and competition can result in physical fatigue, emotional exhaustion, reduced accomplishment, and sport devaluation, all of which are associated with increased withdrawal risk (Gustafsson et al., 2011). Athletes who lack adequate

support during injury rehabilitation or experience prolonged underperformance may be more likely to disengage because these experiences can diminish motivation and confidence (Podlog & Eklund, 2007). Recent evidence among university athletes indicates that less adaptive motivational profiles are associated with lower well-being, greater burnout symptoms, and stronger intentions to withdraw from sport, whereas athletes who feel valued within their sporting environments report more favourable motivational experiences (Saward et al., 2024). Uncertainty regarding future career prospects may further compound these pressures, particularly where alternative career pathways are limited or poorly defined (Stambulova et al., 2009). Burnout and dropout risk therefore emerge through the interaction of personal motivation, sporting demands, performance experiences, and environmental support.

The sustainability of athletic careers is also influenced by structural conditions such as access to development programmes, competition opportunities, educational assistance, sponsorship, and post-career planning. In many sport systems, particularly in developing contexts, these structures are insufficiently developed, creating gaps that affect athlete progression and long-term engagement (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Athletes may experience difficulty balancing sport with education or employment, resulting in competing priorities that influence participation decisions. Research involving parents of dual-career athletes shows that successfully combining sport and education requires practical, emotional, and relational support from families, coaches, and educational institutions (Tessitore et al., 2021). Current dual-career scholarship similarly emphasises the importance of context, transitions, coping resources, empowerment, mental health, and supportive development environments in helping athletes manage sporting and non-sporting demands (Stambulova et al., 2024). Career sustainability is therefore not solely dependent on individual effort but is shaped by the interaction between personal capacity and systemic support.

The Psycho-Economic Ecology of Competitive Endurance in Athletics

The interaction between psychological and socio-economic factors creates a complex environment that shapes athlete participation and retention. Rather than operating independently, these factors influence one another in ways that determine how athletes experience and respond to the demands of competitive sport. Psychological resources such as motivation, confidence, and resilience may enable athletes to persist in challenging conditions, but their effectiveness is often contingent upon the availability of external support systems (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In environments where financial resources and institutional support are limited, even highly motivated athletes may struggle to sustain participation because structural constraints restrict access to training, equipment, recovery, competitions, and development opportunities (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Recent sport-persistence research similarly demonstrates that sustained engagement reflects the combined influence of psychological characteristics and the social and environmental conditions surrounding athletes (Kovács, 2025).

Conversely, socio-economic support can enhance psychological stability by reducing uncertainty and allowing athletes to concentrate more consistently on training and performance. Financial rewards and sponsorship provide material resources while also reinforcing athletes' perceptions of recognition and value, which may strengthen motivation and commitment (Wong & Trumper, 2002). Structured financial support can further improve access to equipment, recovery services, competitions, coaching, and professional development (Rahmani et al., 2024). Evidence from African elite sport systems shows that scholarships, financial assistance, effective coaching, community support, competition access, and institutional coordination can create conditions that facilitate sporting progression (Mthombeni et al., 2023). However, inconsistent funding, poor facilities, unreliable transport, limited scientific assistance, and weak retention systems can undermine athletes' ability to translate psychological commitment into sustained participation (Mthombeni et al., 2024). Athlete retention is therefore shaped by a dynamic balance between internal and external resources, with neither dimension alone providing a complete explanation.

In the context of Kenyan athletics, this psycho-economic interaction is particularly pronounced because athletes frequently navigate environments characterised by strong cultural support alongside significant structural limitations. While psychological resilience and motivation are important for coping with the demands of the sport, their influence is mediated by socio-economic realities such as access to funding, sponsorship, institutional assistance, and viable development pathways (Mair & Smith, 2022). Contemporary sport-persistence research reinforces the need to examine continued participation through a socio-ecological framework that recognises influences operating at individual, relational, organisational, and wider environmental levels (Kovács, 2025). African evidence further demonstrates that psychological commitment may be weakened where athletes lack reliable financial assistance, facilities, transport, scientific services, competition exposure, and coordinated institutional support (Mthombeni et al., 2023; Mthombeni et al., 2024). Examining athlete retention through an integrated lens is therefore necessary to capture the interplay between psychological and socio-economic factors and explain how this interaction affects sustained engagement within competitive sport systems.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the influence of psychological and socio-economic factors on athlete continuity in Kenyan track and field. The design was considered appropriate because it allows for the systematic collection of quantitative data from a defined population and facilitates the examination of relationships between variables without manipulating the study environment. It also enables the use of statistical techniques such as correlation and regression to determine both the strength and predictive capacity of independent variables on the dependent variable.

Target Population and Sample

The target population for the study comprised track and field athletes in Kenya who were actively engaged in training and competition at both semi-professional and professional levels. A sample size of 230 athletes was selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that respondents had relevant experience within the sport and could provide meaningful data on the variables under investigation. The sampling approach focused on athletes from different event categories, including sprinting, middle-distance, long-distance, jumping, and throwing events, to capture a broad representation of the athletics context.

Research Instruments

Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure psychological factors (motivation, confidence, and mental toughness), socio-economic factors (financial reward, sponsorship, and family support), and athlete continuity. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended items that allowed for standardized responses and facilitated quantitative analysis. The instrument was structured to capture both the intensity and perception of each variable, enabling the assessment of their relationships and predictive influence on athlete continuity.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the research instrument was established through expert review, ensuring that the items adequately captured the constructs under investigation and were appropriate for the study context. Reliability was assessed using a pilot test, and the instrument yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.73, indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency for the variables measured. This ensured that the instrument produced stable and consistent results suitable for statistical analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted through the administration of questionnaires to the selected athletes across various training centres and competition settings. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and were given instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. The process was structured to ensure that responses were collected systematically and within a defined timeframe, minimizing data loss and enhancing the completeness of the dataset.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Pan African University Life and Earth Sciences Institute (Including Agriculture and Health) Research Ethics Committee, approval reference number PAULESI/ADM/01/27-07. Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study to ensure the protection of participants. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection, and participation was voluntary. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and the data collected were

used solely for academic purposes. These measures ensured that the study adhered to ethical research practices and protected the rights and well-being of participants.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages, were used to summarize socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was employed to examine the relationships between variables, while multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses and determine the joint predictive effects of psychological and socio-economic factors on athlete continuity. For the composite regression analysis, the psychological factor score was computed by averaging the questionnaire items measuring motivation, confidence, and mental toughness, while the socio-economic factor score was computed by averaging the questionnaire items measuring financial reward, sponsorship, and family support. These two composite scores were then entered into the regression model as predictor variables to determine their combined predictive influence on athlete retention. Averaging was used to preserve the original scale of measurement and to ensure that each construct contributed proportionately to the composite model. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Limitations of the Method

The study was subject to several methodological limitations that may influence the interpretation of the findings. The use of a cross-sectional design limited the ability to establish causal relationships between variables, as data were collected at a single point in time. The reliance on self-reported questionnaire data introduced the possibility of response bias, including social desirability bias. Additionally, the use of purposive sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of athletes, as the sample may not fully represent all categories within Kenyan athletics.

Results of the study

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	130	56.5
	Female	100	43.5
Age	≤17	1	0.4
	18–24	105	45.7
	25–34	84	36.5
	35–44	24	10.4
	≥45	16	7.0
Event	Sprinting	78	33.9

Variable	Category	n	%
	Jumping	47	20.4
	Throwing	41	17.8
	Middle Distance	40	17.4
	Long Distance	24	10.4
Level	Semi-professional	150	65.2
	Professional	80	34.8

Note. N = total number of respondents.

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The sample consisted of 230 athletes, with males (n = 130, 56.5%) slightly more represented than females (n = 100, 43.5%). The majority of respondents were aged between 18–24 years (n = 105, 45.7%) and 25–34 years (n = 84, 36.5%), indicating a predominantly young athletic population. In terms of event categories, sprinting had the highest representation (n = 78, 33.9%), followed by jumping (n = 47, 20.4%), throwing (n = 41, 17.8%), middle-distance (n = 40, 17.4%), and long-distance events (n = 24, 10.4%). Most respondents were semi-professional athletes (n = 150, 65.2%), while 80 (34.8%) were professional athletes.

These characteristics indicate that the sample is largely composed of athletes at transitional and development stages of their careers, where retention challenges are most likely to occur. The diversity across event categories and competitive levels provides an adequate basis for examining the influence of psychological and socio-economic factors on athlete retention.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix of Psychological and Socio-Economic Factors with Athlete Retention

		Retention	Motivation	Confidence	Mental Toughness	Financial Reward	Sponsorship	Family Support
Retention	Pearson Correlation	1	-.065	-.014	.152*	.153*	.195**	.101
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.323	.827	.021	.020	.003	.101
	N	230	230	230	230	230	230	230
Motivation	Pearson Correlation	-.065	1	.409*	-.028			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.323		.000	.672			
	N	230	230	230	230			
Confidence	Pearson Correlation	-.014	.409*	1	-.018			

		Retenti on	Motivat ion	Confide nce	Mental Toughn ess	Financ ial Rear d	Sponsors hip	Famil y Supp ort
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.827	.000		.785			
	N	230	230	230	230			
Mental Toughne ss	Pearson Correlat ion	.152*	-.028	-.018	1			
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.021	.672	.785				
	N	230	230	230	230			
Financial Reward	Pearson Correlat ion	.153*				1	.368*	.076
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.020					.000	.250
	N	230				230	230	230
Sponsors hip	Pearson Correlat ion	.195**				.368*	1	.073
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.003				.000		.270
	N	230				230	230	230
Family Support	Pearson Correlat ion	.101				.076	.073	1
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.101				.250	.270	
	N	230				230	230	230

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation matrix showing the relationship between psychological and socio-economic factors and athlete retention. Among the psychological factors, mental toughness had a weak but statistically significant positive relationship with athlete retention ($r = .152$, $p = .021$). Motivation had a weak negative and non-significant relationship with athlete retention ($r = -.065$, $p = .323$), while confidence also showed a weak negative and non-significant relationship with athlete retention ($r = -.014$, $p = .827$). This indicates that only mental toughness was significantly associated with athlete retention among the psychological variables.

For the socio-economic factors, financial reward had a weak but statistically significant positive relationship with athlete retention ($r = .153$, $p = .020$), while sponsorship also

showed a weak but statistically significant positive relationship with athlete retention ($r = .195$, $p = .003$). Family support had a weak positive but non-significant relationship with athlete retention ($r = .101$, $p = .101$). These findings indicate that financial reward and sponsorship were significantly associated with athlete retention at the bivariate level, with sponsorship showing the strongest relationship among the socio-economic factors.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant joint prediction of psychological factors (motivation, confidence, mental toughness) on track and field athletes' retention in Kenya.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis of Joint Prediction of Psychological Factors on Athlete Retention

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Regression	37.044	3	12.348	2.204	.088
Residual	1266.004	226	5.602		
Total	1303.048	229			
R		=			0.169
R ²		=			0.028
Adjusted R ²			=		0.016
Standard Error = 2.36681					

Note. $p > .05$.

Table 3 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis examining the joint prediction of psychological factors on athlete retention. The model yielded a multiple correlation coefficient of $R = 0.169$ and a coefficient of determination of $R^2 = 0.028$, indicating that psychological factors explain 2.8% of the variance in athlete retention. The model produced an F-value of $F(3, 226) = 2.204$ with a p-value of .088, indicating that the model was not statistically significant.

Since the model was not statistically significant ($p > .05$), the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is accepted. This indicates that psychological factors do not have a significant joint predictive effect on athlete retention.

H₀₂: There is no significant relative prediction of motivation, confidence and mental toughness on athletes' retention in Kenya.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis of Relative Prediction of Psychological Factors on Athlete Retention (N = 230)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	Remark
Constant	17.773	1.844		9.639	.000	
Motivation	-0.138	0.125	-0.079	-1.103	.271	Not significant
Confidence	-0.076	0.123	-0.044	-0.614	.540	Not significant
Mental Toughness	0.197	0.087	0.149	2.267	.024*	Significant

Note. * $p < .05$.

Table 4 presents the relative contribution of psychological factors to athlete retention. Mental toughness showed a statistically significant positive contribution ($\beta = 0.149$, $t = 2.267$, $p = .024$), while motivation ($\beta = -0.079$, $t = -1.103$, $p = .271$) and confidence ($\beta = -0.044$, $t = -0.614$, $p = .540$) were not statistically significant predictors.

Since only mental toughness was statistically significant ($p < .05$) while motivation and confidence were not ($p > .05$), the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is partially rejected. This indicates that only mental toughness has a significant relative predictive effect on athlete retention.

H₀₃: There is no significant joint prediction of socio-economic factors (financial rewards, sponsorship, and family support) on athletes' retention in Kenya.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis of Joint Prediction of Socio-Economic Factors on Athlete Retention (N = 230)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Regression	68.609	3	22.870	4.187	.007*
Residual	1234.439	226	5.462		
Total	1303.048	229			
R		=			0.229
R ²		=			0.053
Adjusted R ²			=		0.040
Standard Error = 2.33712					

Note. * $p < .05$.

Table 5 presents the regression results for the joint prediction of socio-economic factors on athlete retention. The model yielded $R = 0.229$ and $R^2 = 0.053$, indicating that socio-economic factors explain 5.3% of the variance in athlete retention. The model was statistically significant, $F(3, 226) = 4.187$, $p = .007$.

Since the model was statistically significant ($p < .05$), the null hypothesis (H_{03}) is rejected. This indicates that socio-economic factors have a significant joint predictive effect on athlete retention.

H₀₄: There is no significant relative prediction of financial rewards, sponsorship and family support on athletes' retention in Kenya.

Table 6: Multiple Regression Analysis of Relative Prediction of Socio-Economic Factors on Athlete Retention

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Remark
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	15.438	0.904		17.084	0.000	
Financial reward	0.113	0.088	0.089	1.283	0.201	Not significant

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Remark
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
Sponsorship	0.167	0.074	0.156	2.245	0.026	Significant
Family support	0.142	0.112	0.083	1.272	0.205	Not Significant

Note. * $p < .05$.

Table 6 presents the relative contribution of socio-economic factors to athlete retention. Sponsorship showed a statistically significant positive contribution ($\beta = 0.156$, $t = 2.245$, $p = .026$), while financial reward ($\beta = 0.089$, $t = 1.283$, $p = .201$) and family support ($\beta = 0.083$, $t = 1.272$, $p = .205$) were not statistically significant predictors.

Since only sponsorship was statistically significant ($p < .05$) while financial reward and family support were not ($p > .05$), the null hypothesis (H_{04}) is partially rejected. This indicates that only sponsorship has a significant relative predictive effect on athlete retention.

H₀₅: There is no significant composite prediction of psychological and socio-economic factors on athletes' retention in Kenya.

Table 7: Multiple Regression Analysis of Composite Prediction of Psychological and Socio-Economic Factors on Athlete Retention

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Regression	72.803	2	36.401	6.717	.001*
Residual	1230.245	227	5.420		
Total	1303.048	229			
R		=			0.236
R ²		=			0.056
Adjusted R ²				=	0.048
Standard Error = 2.32800					

Note. * $p < .05$.

Table 7 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis examining the composite prediction of psychological and socio-economic factors on athlete retention. The model yielded $R = 0.236$ and $R^2 = 0.056$, indicating that the combined variables explain 5.6% of the variance in athlete retention. The model was statistically significant, $F(2, 227) = 6.717$, $p = .001$.

Since the model was statistically significant ($p < .05$), the null hypothesis (H_{05}) is rejected. This indicates that psychological and socio-economic factors jointly have a significant predictive effect on athlete retention.

Psychological Resources and Athlete Continuity

The results indicate that psychological resources do not operate uniformly in shaping athlete retention, as reflected in the non-significant joint model ($F(3,226) = 2.204, p = .088, R^2 = .028$), alongside the pattern where only mental toughness demonstrated a significant contribution while motivation and confidence did not. This challenges the common assumption that internal drive and self-belief are sufficient to sustain participation, particularly in competitive sport settings. Motivation is typically associated with persistence and long-term engagement, yet its lack of significance in this study suggests that its influence may be conditional rather than universal. Evidence from sport psychology shows that motivation alone may not sustain engagement when athletes are exposed to competing pressures such as financial constraints or structural limitations (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and similar inconsistencies have been observed in participation studies where motivational effects weaken in constrained environments (Eime et al., 2013). Confidence, which is often linked to performance stability, also failed to demonstrate influence, reinforcing the argument that psychological readiness does not automatically translate into sustained participation (Weinberg & Gould, 2023).

A closer examination of the individual effects reveals a shift toward resilience-based explanations, where mental toughness emerged as the only significant psychological predictor ($\beta = 0.149, p < 0.05$). This highlights the importance of coping capacity over traditional motivational constructs, suggesting that sustained engagement depends more on an athlete's ability to withstand pressure than on their initial drive to participate. Mental toughness reflects the capacity to manage stress, remain focused, and persist despite adverse conditions, making it particularly relevant in sports characterized by continuous physical and psychological demands. Empirical studies consistently show that athletes with higher resilience are better able to maintain engagement under pressure and recover from setbacks in high-performance environments (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012), while endurance-based disciplines further emphasize the role of psychological endurance in sustaining participation (Clough et al., 2002). At the same time, the relatively weak magnitude of the effect indicates that resilience alone does not fully explain retention, aligning with evidence that psychological attributes often function as enabling rather than dominant determinants of continued participation (Gustafsson et al., 2011).

These patterns point to limitations in interpreting psychological processes as independent drivers of sustained engagement. While frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory emphasize autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key mechanisms underlying persistence, the absence of significant effects for motivation and confidence suggests that these needs may not be sufficiently supported within the current context. Where athletes operate under external pressures and constrained conditions, intrinsic motivation may be undermined, reducing its capacity to influence long-term participation (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Research further indicates that motivation is highly sensitive to environmental conditions and may weaken when structural barriers limit opportunities for progression or reward (Ntoumanis, 2012). In this light, psychological factors appear to operate within a broader

system of influences, where their effectiveness depends on the extent to which environmental conditions allow them to be expressed and sustained over time.

Mental Toughness as a Resilience Mechanism

Mental toughness emerged as the only psychological variable with a statistically significant effect on athlete retention ($\beta = 0.149$, $p < 0.05$), distinguishing it from motivation and confidence, which did not demonstrate meaningful influence. This pattern suggests that sustained participation in track and field is less dependent on general psychological readiness and more on the ability to endure ongoing demands. Mental toughness captures the capacity to remain focused, disciplined, and composed under pressure, which becomes particularly important in environments characterized by repetitive training loads, performance uncertainty, and competitive stress. In contrast, motivation and confidence, while theoretically important, are more susceptible to fluctuation and may not provide a stable foundation for long-term engagement when athletes encounter persistent challenges (Weinberg & Gould, 2023). This distinction indicates that resilience-based attributes may serve as more reliable indicators of retention than broader psychological constructs.

The relevance of mental toughness becomes more evident when considered within the context of competitive athletics, where athletes are required to manage injury, fatigue, and performance setbacks over extended periods. The ability to persist despite these challenges is central to maintaining engagement, particularly in disciplines where progress is gradual and outcomes are uncertain. Empirical research shows that resilience enables athletes to sustain effort and recover from adversity, especially in high-performance environments where exposure to stress is continuous (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). In endurance-oriented sports, the capacity to tolerate discomfort and maintain focus is often more critical than initial enthusiasm, as participation requires long-term psychological endurance rather than short-term motivation (Clough et al., 2002). This helps explain why mental toughness demonstrated significance in the present findings, as it reflects a capacity that directly aligns with the demands of the sport.

At a broader level, the prominence of mental toughness points to an adaptive response to environmental conditions rather than an isolated psychological trait. In settings where external support may be inconsistent or limited, athletes who possess stronger coping mechanisms are better positioned to navigate uncertainty and remain engaged. This suggests that mental toughness may function as a compensatory mechanism, enabling athletes to sustain participation despite structural constraints. At the same time, its relatively modest effect size indicates that resilience alone is not sufficient to fully explain retention, reinforcing the view that psychological capacity must operate alongside supportive conditions to produce sustained outcomes. Consequently, mental toughness should be understood not as a standalone determinant, but as part of a broader interaction between individual capability and the environment within which athletes operate.

Economic Incentives and Participation Decisions

The findings indicate that financial reward demonstrates a weak but statistically significant association with athlete retention at the correlational level ($r = 0.153$, $p < 0.05$), yet does not retain significance within the regression model ($\beta = 0.089$, $p = .201$). This distinction is important, as it suggests that economic considerations are present in participation decisions but do not independently sustain athlete engagement when examined alongside other socio-economic factors. Continued involvement in track and field therefore appears to be influenced by the perceived financial viability of participation, particularly in contexts where athletes face competing livelihood demands. In such environments, engagement is often weighed against alternative income opportunities, positioning financial reward as a relevant but limited factor. Empirical evidence supports this view, showing that financial constraints can restrict participation by limiting access to training, competition, and recovery resources (Wong & Trumper, 2002), while economic incentives may reinforce commitment by reducing opportunity costs associated with sport (De Bosscher et al., 2015). However, the relatively weak magnitude of the relationship, coupled with its loss of significance in the regression model, indicates that financial reward does not function as a primary driver of retention but rather as one element within a broader decision-making structure.

This pattern becomes clearer when considered in relation to the overall explanatory power of socio-economic variables, which, although statistically significant at the model level ($R^2 = 0.053$), account for only a small proportion of variance in athlete retention. The diminished role of financial reward within the regression model suggests that its influence may be conditional, overlapping with or being absorbed by more stable forms of support such as sponsorship. Rather than operating independently, financial incentives appear to contribute to participation only when embedded within a wider support structure. This interpretation introduces a nuanced reading of motivational dynamics, where external rewards do not necessarily undermine intrinsic motivation but instead interact with it in context-dependent ways. While Self-Determination Theory emphasizes the potential tension between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the present findings suggest that financial reward functions more as an enabling condition than as a competing motive. In constrained environments, where participation entails significant economic cost, extrinsic incentives may support rather than disrupt engagement, a position reinforced by studies highlighting the contextual nature of motivation in sport (Ntoumanis, 2012; De Bosscher et al., 2015).

Placed within a broader analytical frame, the role of financial reward is best understood as part of the structural conditions shaping athlete behaviour. Economic factors influence not only individual decisions but also the availability of resources that underpin participation, including access to training infrastructure, competition exposure, and development pathways. From this perspective, financial reward operates less as a direct determinant and more as a stabilizing factor that reduces immediate barriers to engagement. This aligns with the Social-Ecological perspective, where behaviour is shaped by interactions between

individual capacity and environmental conditions, rather than by isolated variables (Golden & Earp, 2012). The findings therefore suggest that while financial reward contributes to the feasibility of continued participation, it does not independently sustain it. Instead, its influence is contingent on its interaction with other forms of support, reinforcing the view that economic incentives are necessary but insufficient conditions for long-term athlete retention.

Sponsorship as Structural Support

Sponsorship emerged as the most influential socio-economic factor, demonstrating a statistically significant positive effect on athlete retention both at the correlational level ($r = 0.195$, $p < 0.01$) and within the regression model ($\beta = 0.156$, $p = .026$). This positions sponsorship as the only socio-economic variable with a consistent and independent predictive effect, distinguishing it from financial reward and family support, which did not retain significance in the multivariate analysis. The strength of this finding suggests that structured and sustained forms of support play a more decisive role in shaping retention than general economic incentives. Unlike irregular financial rewards, sponsorship provides a more stable and predictable resource base, enabling athletes to maintain consistent training, access competitions, and reduce uncertainty associated with participation. Empirical evidence supports this distinction, indicating that athletes with access to structured funding mechanisms are more likely to sustain long-term engagement due to improved training conditions and reduced financial stress (De Bosscher et al., 2015), while broader analyses of sport systems show that stability of support is a key determinant of continued participation (Rahmani et al., 2024; Wong & Trumper, 2002).

What becomes apparent is that sponsorship operates beyond the narrow scope of financial assistance, functioning instead as a multidimensional support mechanism embedded within the athlete development system. Sponsored athletes are not only financially supported but also gain access to enhanced training environments, professional networks, and competitive exposure, all of which contribute to their ability to remain engaged in sport. This layered influence explains why sponsorship retained significance in the regression model while other socio-economic variables did not, as its impact extends across multiple dimensions of athlete experience. Studies examining elite sport pathways have similarly shown that access to institutionalized support structures is more strongly associated with retention than isolated economic inputs (De Bosscher et al., 2015; Eime et al., 2013). In this sense, sponsorship represents a structural resource that shapes both the conditions and opportunities available to athletes, rather than merely supplementing their income.

Viewed through a broader conceptual lens, the significance of sponsorship reflects the role of organizational and environmental support in sustaining athlete participation. Within a multi-level framework of influence, sponsorship can be understood as operating at the intersection of organizational and systemic levels, where it affects not only individual athletes but also the distribution of resources within the sport system. By providing consistent support, sponsorship reduces uncertainty and enhances the stability required for

long-term engagement, reinforcing the link between environmental conditions and participation outcomes (Golden & Earp, 2012). At the same time, the relatively modest explanatory power of the overall model ($R^2 = 0.053$) suggests that while sponsorship is a key determinant, its effects are constrained by broader systemic limitations, including unequal access and limited availability. This indicates that sponsorship functions as a critical but unevenly distributed resource, and its impact on athlete retention is shaped not only by its presence but also by how widely it is accessible across different levels of participation.

Interaction Effects of Psychological Resilience and Socio-Economic Structures in Sustaining Athlete Retention

The overall pattern of findings suggests that athlete retention is best understood as the result of interacting influences rather than isolated effects, as reflected in the significant composite model ($F(2,227) = 6.717, p = .001, R^2 = 0.056$). While individual variables demonstrated varying levels of influence, the combined effect of psychological and socio-economic factors indicates that retention emerges from their joint operation. At the same time, the relatively low explanatory power of the model shows that these factors account for only a modest proportion of variance, reinforcing the complexity of sustained participation in competitive sport. This aligns with broader sport development research, which consistently shows that athlete engagement is shaped by multiple overlapping determinants rather than a single dominant factor (De Bosscher et al., 2015). The findings therefore suggest that neither psychological resilience nor socio-economic support alone is sufficient to sustain retention, but that their interaction provides a more accurate explanation of participation outcomes.

A closer interpretation of the results reveals a complementary relationship between internal capacity and external support. Mental toughness, as the only significant psychological predictor, appears to function as a stabilizing mechanism that enables athletes to cope with the demands of training and competition, while sponsorship, as the strongest socio-economic factor, provides the structural conditions necessary for continued engagement. The absence of significant effects for motivation, confidence, financial reward, and family support further highlights that retention is not driven by general psychological readiness or basic economic incentives alone. Instead, sustained participation appears to depend on a balance between the ability to endure pressure and the availability of consistent support systems. Empirical studies support this interaction, showing that psychological resilience becomes more influential in environments where structural constraints are present, while external support determines whether that resilience can be effectively sustained over time (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012; Wong & Trumper, 2002).

From a broader analytical standpoint, these findings point to a system-level explanation of athlete retention, where individual and environmental factors operate in continuous interaction. Psychological resilience enables persistence under challenging conditions, but its effectiveness is contingent on the presence of supportive structures that reduce

uncertainty and facilitate development. Conversely, socio-economic support enhances participation by improving access to resources, but does not guarantee sustained engagement in the absence of adequate coping capacity. This reciprocal relationship reflects the layered nature of athlete development, where behaviour is shaped by the interaction between personal attributes and environmental conditions (Golden & Earp, 2012). The findings therefore reinforce the need for integrated approaches to athlete development, as interventions that focus exclusively on either psychological or socio-economic dimensions are unlikely to produce sustained improvements in retention.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of psychological and socio-economic factors on athlete continuity in Kenyan track and field and found a differentiated pattern of influence. Psychological factors did not demonstrate significant joint predictive power, although mental toughness showed a weak but significant relationship, while motivation and confidence were not significant. In contrast, socio-economic factors, particularly sponsorship and financial reward, showed a significant but modest effect. These findings indicate that athlete continuity is not primarily driven by internal psychological attributes alone but is shaped by a combination of resilience and external support mechanisms.

The results further suggest that athlete continuity is a multifactorial phenomenon, where neither psychological nor socio-economic factors independently provide a complete explanation. Instead, sustained participation emerges from the interaction between individual capacity and structural conditions. The low explanatory power of the models highlights the presence of additional influences beyond those examined, reinforcing the need for a more integrated and systemic approach to athlete development and support.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed based on the findings of the study:

1. Structured sponsorship programs should be expanded to ensure consistent and equitable financial support across different levels of athletes, reducing uncertainty and enabling sustained participation.
2. Athlete development systems should incorporate mental resilience training, with a focus on building coping capacity, stress management, and psychological endurance required in competitive sport.
3. Access to quality training facilities, coaching, and competition opportunities should be improved as part of broader sponsorship and athlete-support structures. Although these factors were not directly measured in the study, they represent practical mechanisms through which sponsorship and institutional support can strengthen athlete retention.
4. Stronger coordination between sport organizations, government bodies, private sponsors, and athlete development programmes should be promoted to create a more stable support environment. This recommendation is drawn as a forward-

looking implication of the finding that socio-economic support, particularly sponsorship, contributes significantly to athlete retention.

Areas for Future Study

Future research should adopt more comprehensive approaches to better understand athlete continuity by incorporating additional variables such as coaching quality, injury management, institutional support, and career transition pathways. Longitudinal designs would be particularly valuable in capturing how participation evolves over time, while mixed-method approaches could provide deeper insight into athletes' lived experiences and decision-making processes. Additionally, comparative studies across different sports and regions would help determine whether the patterns observed in Kenyan track and field are consistent in other contexts, thereby improving the generalizability and applicability of findings.

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