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Chamonix, 12 August 2022

UTMB Mont-Blanc: trail running promotes the mental health of runners according to a study conducted with the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS)

Chamonix (5th of July 2022) – Can trail running be the source of the well-being and mental health of those who practice it? In a post-covid society where these questions have emerged in public debate, this is a currently relevant subject. These are the questions raised and examined by The [Ultra Présent](#) study, conducted with the [CNRS](#) and presented on the [Ultra Sports Science](#) site, by researcher in social sciences **Mathilde Plard**, accompanied by the four psychology experts Marine Paucsik, Quentin Hallez, Guillaume Tachon and Rebecca Shankland. Distributed on the social networks of the UTMB Mont-Blanc for quantitative data collection, the Ultra Présent study provides the initial possible answers. The feedback in the form of questions and answers on the results of the study shed a little more light on the benefits that trail running can have in our society.

In tangible terms, what did this study reveal?

Mathilde Plard: The study allowed us to gain a more detailed understanding of the feelings experienced during trail running. We started from the need to ascertain if there were any psychological processes during practice that would explain this enthusiasm for trail running. We have collected different indicators - the perception of time, flexibility, the sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem - to try to measure them in a concrete way according to the type of practice, harmonious or obsessive. With the answers collected and

analysed, we have concluded that the practice of trail running does indeed have an influence on these feelings.

Can trail running be a tool for regulating the mental health of individuals as a public policy?

Yes. The diversification of race formats is allowing as many people as possible to discover these psychological sensations over 30km and 80km. The benefits are observed at different levels. Trail running is a protective factor of mental health, it allows you to connect to your body, be part of a group and it is also gets you moving. In these times of sedentarism and isolation, people must be encouraged to go outside and reach out to others. Trail running limits anxiety and depression, and it improves self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Overall, does trail running have more advantages than disadvantages for the mental health of those who practice it?

After running a trail, we experience a kind of embodiment. The spectrum of corporeal boundaries is finer. The brain is more open to the present moment, which is also a protective factor of mental health. The practice of trail running also develops a sense of belonging to the community, which is also an important factor in mental wellbeing. The negative aspects are related to the private sphere. When trail running becomes too restrictive a framework for the important people in the runner's life it can determine all the runner's leisure and holidays. There is also a risk of losing the level of pleasure. This is called hedonic habituation. In all cases, whether the practice is reasoned or obsessive, we find these positive and negative aspects.

What are the risks of misuse and why is it important to remedy them?

When the person's entire world is focused on trail running, there is a risk, in the event of an injury, that all socialisation may collapse along with the risk of psychic collapse. In order to have a more balanced relationship to our practice, we must find other forms of commitment, such as volunteering.

The study reveals that the practice of trail running provides a sense of self-efficacy and at the same time trail running also fosters a very strong link to the community. How compatible are these?

Trail-running is an exercise in being with oneself. Preparation is tantamount to micromanagement. There is a relationship to data and Excel tables, which is extremely important. This does not prevent us from having a collective relationship with the sport. There is this feeling of belonging to the group, a human warmth that is difficult to describe scientifically. The start of a race is like the setting off of a pack, of a whole. During a race, we accept our vulnerability and show it, sometimes by crying. The collective feeling

is essential and very specific to this sport. There are no other sports that unite men, women, elites and amateurs.

Would trail running provide meaning in a society losing its way?

Meaning comes through the body in the practice of trail running. The feeling of acute perceptions, being attentive to the temperature and the air. In the workplace one can feel disembodied. Trail running fosters gratitude and a feeling of appreciation of oneself and one's body. It also instils a feeling of appreciation towards others. This is what I call a gratitude hit, for the volunteers for example. Trail running is the praise of dependence. This feels good in a society that demands increasing independence and autonomy. It also strengthens the feeling of gratitude towards the world around us. We feel quite small yet part of a whole.

The study also examines the relationship between the UTMB Index and the type of practice (reasoned or obsessive), what are the implications?

The steadier the practice, the less this feeling of appreciation. As with drugs, there is a kind of addiction. The wellbeing hit subsides in intensity for many. The question is how to maintain this state of wonder throughout one's practice. These are often individual trajectories. The stars of the discipline sustain this intense relationship to their practice. They are the pioneers of the original forms of the practice. They will stay grounded and open to engaging with other interests, such as wine for example. They are people who have a passionate relationship with the practice, but they are not rigid.

In your opinion, what are the pointers that could revolutionise the approach to the practice?

Trail running can be a tool to support people suffering. It provides a way of getting one's feet firmly back on the ground. A pair of shorts, a t-shirt and trainers - the solution is radical, but it works.

Note aux éditeurs

Mathilde Plard : Géographe et chercheuse au CNRS en Sciences Humaines et Sociales. Elle travaille notamment sur les distances, les différentes pratiques de courses à pied et sur les événements sportifs associés. Les projets de recherche qu'elle mène interrogent ce que les pratiques sportives disent de la société et des individus.

Ultra Présent

Résultats de l'étude sur les processus psychologiques impliqués dans la pratique du trail-running d'ultra endurance

©s: Mathilde Pélissier, CNRS, UMR 6595
Marine Fausk, Quentin Haffez, Rebecca
Shankland, & Rebecca Shankland



Collaboration

- Partenariat de recherche
- Aout 2021 : Echanges à Chamonix sur les objectifs de recherche
- Sept-Oct 2021 : Conception de l'étude sous la direction de Mathilde Pélissier (CNRS) avec Marine Fausk, Quentin Haffez, Rebecca Shankland
- Oct 2021 : Soumission du protocole à un comité éthique pour validation (obtenue par l'U.S.B. Belgique)
- Nov à Dec 2021 : diffusion du questionnaire par l'UTMB
- Dec 2021 : fin du recueil des données et premières analyses



Outils de mesures validés

- **FlowState** (MPP1) : multidimensional psychological flexibility inventory (van den Broek, R. H., & Wilson, 2018)
- **Satisfaction of Effort Scale** (SES) : Echelle de mesure du sentiment d'effort personnelle (Schwartz et al., 1999)
- **Disengagement** : the subscale of disengagement of the Experience questionnaire (Finco, D. M., Moore, M. T., van Dulmen, M., Segal, Z. V., Tweeddale, J. D., Ma, H., & Williams, J. M. G. (2007).
- **Zappas**: Obsessive and harmonious passion (de Volderend, R. J., Blustein, C.M., Higgins, G.A., Koester, K., Ruzick, C., Leonard, M., Gagne, M., & Morin, J. (2023) obsessive and harmonious passion.
- **FlowState** : Involvement of Flowing State (N. Carron, M. Ntouy et G. Asanidou (2007).

Study presented on the website [Ultra Sports Sciences](#)

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