Name: Muhammad Dwiky Yanuarezza

NIM : 1202230031

1. Effect of Strength Training Programs in Middle- and Long-Distance Runners' Economy at Different Running Speeds: A Systematic Review with Meta-analysis (Llanos-Lagos et al., n.d.).

This study aims to answer whether strength training programs can improve running economy in middle and long distance runners and whether these benefits are consistent across different running speeds. The central issue addressed is the inconsistency in previous findings regarding the impact of strength training on running economy, particularly whether such improvements are generalizable or occur only at specific speeds. The motivation for this research stems from the critical role of running economy as a key determinant of endurance performance, which is influenced by neuromuscular and biomechanical adaptations that strength training may enhance their muscle.

The study seeks to fill a gap in the scientific literature by providing a current synthesis of evidence on the effects of strength training on running economy across various running intensities, offering highly relevant insights for coaches, athletes, and sports scientists in designing evidence based training programs. The theoretical framework is grounded in exercise physiology, particularly neuromuscular adaptation theory and the principle of training specificity, which suggests that physiological changes from training may not fully transfer to all performance conditions.

The methodology follows PRISMA guidelines for systematic reviews and meta-analyses. The authors searched multiple scientific databases and included controlled trials reporting running economy data before and after strength training interventions in trained runners. Statistical analysis employed a random effects model to calculate standardized mean differences, with subgroup analyses based on running speed. The meta-analysis, which included 13 studies and 276 runners, revealed that strength training significantly improved overall running economy, with the largest effects observed at moderate running speeds, typically 60 to 80 percent of VO_2max. Improvements at very low or near-race speeds were smaller and less consistent. Interestingly, the type of strength training whether heavy resistance, plyometrics, or a combination did not significantly affect outcomes, and even short programs of six weeks or less produced meaningful improvements.

The findings suggest that the neuromuscular adaptations from strength training, such as improved tendon stiffness and more efficient motor unit recruitment are most functionally transferable to running at moderate intensities, where biomechanical efficiency plays a dominant role. At very high speeds, metabolic and cardiovascular demands may overshadow these mechanical benefits, explaining the diminished effect on running economy near race pace. Conversely, at very low speeds, the low energy cost may mask small improvements. This pattern

supports a nuanced interpretation of training specificity while strength training is not universally beneficial across all speeds, it is highly effective within the intensity range most relevant to daily training, thereby indirectly supporting race performance through enhanced training quality and fatigue resistance.

Based on these findings, the study concludes that strength training is indeed effective in enhancing running economy in middle and long distance runners, though its benefits are partially speed-specific, being most pronounced at commonly used training intensities. In personal assessment, this study is rigorously and transparently designed, employing scientifically recognized methods. However, the limited number of studies reporting data at high speeds reduces the strength of conclusions for actual race conditions. Nevertheless, these findings provide strong support for integrating strength training into endurance athletic programs.

2. Meta-Analyses of the Effects of Habitual Running on Indices of Health in Physically Inactive Adults (Hespanhol Junior et al., 2015).

This systematic review and meta-analysis addresses the research question of whether habitual endurance running improves key biomedical markers of health in physically inactive adults, and how these effects vary according to training duration, frequency, and other program characteristics. The problem stems from inconsistent or fragmented evidence on the specific health benefits of running as a standalone intervention, despite its global popularity as a form of physical activity. The motivation for this investigation is rooted in the urgent public health need to combat physical inactivity a leading risk factor for non-communicable diseases and premature mortality by promoting accessible, low-cost interventions like running.

The study is theoretically grounded in exercise physiology and the dose-response principle, which posits that health adaptations are proportional to the volume and intensity of physical activity. The authors conducted a comprehensive systematic review following PRISMA guidelines, searching seven electronic databases without language or date restrictions. They included only randomized controlled trials of at least 8 weeks that compared endurance running programs with no-intervention control groups in healthy but sedentary adults aged 18 – 65. Two reviewers independently assessed eligibility, extracted data, and evaluated risk of bias using the Cochrane tool; disagreements were resolved by a third reviewer. Random-effects meta-analyses were performed on ten health outcomes, and univariate meta-regressions explored dose-response relationships.

The final analysis included 35 studies out of 49 eligible trials, involving 2,024 participants. After approximately one year of running (averaging 3.7 sessions/week, 2.3 hours/week, at 60 – 90% of maximum heart rate), significant improvements were observed in body mass (-3.3 kg), body fat (-2.7%), resting heart rate (-6.7 bpm), VO_2max (+7.1 ml/min/kg), triglycerides (-16.9 mg/dL), and HDL cholesterol (+3.3 mg/dL). No significant changes occurred in BMI, lean body mass, total cholesterol, or LDL cholesterol. Dose-response analysis revealed that longer training duration was consistently associated with greater health benefits, particularly for body mass and VO_2max though surprisingly, higher weekly training volume (hours/week) correlated with smaller VO_2max gains.

This pattern suggests that while running induces clear physiological adaptations, the relationship between training load and health outcomes is not strictly linear. The most robust benefits likely arise from sustained, moderate-volume programs that allow for physiological adaptation without triggering compensatory behaviors (e.g., increased caloric intake or reduced non-exercise activity). The diminished VO_2max response with higher weekly volume may reflect

diminishing returns, inadequate recovery, or shifts in training intensity not captured in the analysis. These findings support a functional interpretation of the dose-response model: consistency over time matters more than sheer volume.

The study concludes that endurance running is an effective, evidence-based strategy for improving multiple indices of cardiometabolic health in previously inactive adults, with benefits amplifying over longer durations. Clinicians and public health authorities can confidently recommend running as a primary prevention tool. In personal evaluation, the study is methodologically robust, transparent, and highly relevant for real-world application. However, limitations include the inability to meta analyze 151 of 161 identified health outcomes due to insufficient data, a strong male bias in the participant pool (79% male), and the absence of multivariate modeling in dose-response analysis due to incomplete reporting in primary studies. Despite these constraints, the findings offer compelling support for integrating running into public health initiatives aimed at reducing sedentary behavior.

3. Effect of Body-Weight-Support Running on Lower-Limb Biomechanics (Neal et al., 2016).

This study investigates how increasing levels of bodyweight support (BWS) during running on a lower-body positive-pressure (LBPP) treadmill affect lower-limb biomechanics, specifically focusing on joint kinematics, kinetics, and spatiotemporal gait characteristics in recreational runners. The central problem addressed is the limited and sometimes conflicting evidence regarding the biomechanical consequences of BWS running, despite its growing use in rehabilitation settings for injured runners. The motivation stems from the clinical need to understand whether LBPP treadmill running preserves natural running mechanics or introduces significant alterations that could compromise rehabilitation outcomes or increase reinjury risk upon return to overground running. Grounded in biomechanics and motor control theory, the research assumes that reducing ground reaction forces through BWS will alter neuromuscular activation patterns and joint loading strategies, thereby modifying gait kinematics in a speed- and load-dependent manner.

The methodology employed a controlled laboratory design with 14 healthy male recreational runners who completed 15 randomized one-minute running trials on an LBPP treadmill across three velocities (60%, 70%, and 80% of VO_2 peak) and five BWS levels (0%, 20%, 40%, 60%, and 80%). Kinematic data from the right knee and ankle were captured using twin axis electrogoniometers, while in-shoe plantar pressure sensors recorded kinetic and spatiotemporal variables during the final 30 seconds of each trial. Data were averaged over 10 consecutive strides, and statistical analysis used a two-factor repeated-measures ANOVA to assess the effects of BWS and velocity.

Results showed that higher BWS significantly increased stride duration and flight time while reducing stride frequency, ground contact time (GCT), and normalized GCT (all $P < 0.001$). At the joint level, increasing BWS led to significantly reduced peak knee flexion and dorsiflexion, as well as decreased overall range of motion (ROM) in both the knee and ankle during the stance phase. Ankle kinematics also revealed greater plantar flexion at initial contact, suggesting a shift toward a forefoot strike pattern, especially at 60 – 80% BWS. Kinetic data confirmed substantial reductions in peak and mean forces across rearfoot, midfoot, and forefoot segments, with the forefoot still bearing significant load (~500 N) even at 80% BWS.

This pattern indicates that BWS running fundamentally alters lower-limb biomechanics: the reduced loading decreases the need for shock absorption, leading to stiffer, less dynamic joint motion during stance. The shift toward forefoot striking at high BWS levels despite overall lower forces implies that load distribution changes in ways that may not be protective for all injury types (e.g., metatarsal stress fractures). Furthermore, the decrease in stride frequency contradicts current recommendations for injury prevention, which favor higher cadence to reduce joint stress. These findings challenge the assumption that LBPP running is a “biomechanically faithful” substitute for normal running and suggest that adaptations are not merely proportional to unloading but involve complex neuromuscular reorganization.

The study concludes that LBPP treadmill running significantly alters lower limb kinematics and

spatiotemporal gait parameters when BWS exceeds 20% of body weight. Clinicians should therefore exercise caution when prescribing high levels of BWS during rehabilitation, as these changes may hinder the reacquisition of normal running mechanics or increase reinjury risk upon return to full weight running. In personal evaluation, the study is methodologically rigorous, with strong control over intensity via VO_2 peak-based velocities and precise biomechanical instrumentation. However, limitations include the exclusive use of male participants, the acute (non training) nature of the protocol, and the lack of muscle activity data to fully explain kinematic changes. Despite these constraints, the findings provide crucial evidence for evidence-based clinical decision-making in sports rehabilitation.

4. Running is Rewarding and Antidepressive (Brené et al., 2007).

This review article explores the neurobiological parallels between voluntary running, addictive drug use, and antidepressant treatments, with a focus on brain reward pathways and hippocampal plasticity. The central research question is whether natural rewarding behaviors like running share common neurochemical and functional mechanisms with drugs of abuse and clinical antidepressants, particularly in relation to mood regulation, neurogenesis, and behavioral reinforcement. The motivation stems from growing evidence that physical activity especially running, exerts potent antidepressant effects in both animal models and humans, yet the underlying neural mechanisms remain incompletely understood. This knowledge gap is clinically relevant, as elucidating how running influences brain function could inform nonpharmacological strategies for treating depression and addiction.

The theoretical framework integrates concepts from behavioral neuroscience, including the mesolimbic dopamine reward system, stress response neurocircuitry, and adult hippocampal neurogenesis. The authors draw on the incentive-sensitization theory of addiction and the neurotrophic hypothesis of depression, which posits that reduced neural plasticity contributes to mood disorders and that effective treatments pharmacological or behavioral restore it. The paper synthesizes findings from genetic, pharmacological, and behavioral studies in rodents, primarily using voluntary wheel running as a model of natural reward. No original data collection was performed instead, the authors critically review and compare results from their own and others' published experiments involving inbred rodent strains, transgenic models, and neurochemical assays.

Key findings include that voluntary running increases dopamine release in the nucleus accumbens mirroring the effect of addictive drugs and induces long-lasting molecular changes such as upregulation of ΔFosB and dynorphin in the striatum. Genetically addiction prone rat and mouse strains (e.g., Lewis rats, C57BL/6 mice) also exhibit high levels of voluntary running, suggesting shared genetic substrates for reward-seeking behaviors. Crucially, running increases cell proliferation and neurogenesis in the dentate gyrus of the hippocampus and elevates neuropeptide Y (NPY) levels effects also seen with standard antidepressants. In the Flinders Sensitive Line (FSL), a genetic rat model of depression, running produces robust antidepressant-like behavioral effects alongside these neurobiological changes, whereas non-depressed control rats show no such response. Interestingly, moderate alcohol consumption also increased hippocampal neurogenesis in mice, contrasting with the neurotoxic effects of high dose or chronic alcohol exposure.

This pattern suggests that both natural rewards and therapeutic interventions converge on common neural substrates: the reward circuitry mediates reinforcement and motivation, while the hippocampus mediates mood regulation through structural plasticity. The fact that running and antidepressants but not necessarily all drugs enhance neurogenesis supports the idea that adaptive

plasticity, rather than mere dopamine activation, underlies sustained mood improvement. Moreover, the dose-dependent effects of running (e.g., excessive running in hypertensive rats suppressed neurogenesis and elevated stress hormones) highlight a U shaped relationship between exercise volume and neurobiological benefit, akin to the distinction between healthy engagement and compulsive overtraining.

The authors conclude that running is not only rewarding but also functionally antidepressive, acting through mechanisms that overlap with but are not identical to those of addictive drugs and pharmacological antidepressants. While drugs may hijack the reward system to produce compulsive use, running appears to engage the same system in a way that promotes adaptive neural remodeling, particularly in the hippocampus.

In personal evaluation, this review is conceptually rich and effectively bridges behavioral, genetic, and neurobiological evidence. However, it relies heavily on rodent models, and the translation of findings like ΔFosB dynamics or strain-specific running behavior to human depression or exercise adherence remains speculative. Additionally, the paper does not address sex differences in depth, despite using both male and female animals in cited studies. Nonetheless, it provides a compelling neuroscientific rationale for prescribing running as a therapeutic intervention and opens avenues for developing novel treatments targeting shared molecular pathways in depression and addiction.

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