



A Comparative Study on Coping Skills of National Male and Female Team Game Athletes

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ABSTRACT

The study of coping skills among national levels athletes based on gender carries significant importance under the domain of sports psychology because it will be beneficial in preparing gender sensitive psychological training program. The present study aims at comparing coping skills of national level male and female team game athletes. The sample consist of 40 male and 40 female interuniversity/national level athletes chosen from team games namely volleyball, basketball, hockey, handball and cricket. Purposively sampling was used for data collection. Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 prepared by Smith et al. (1995) was used for data collection. It was found that coping skills of national level male athletes was significantly higher as compared to national female athletes. It was concluded that coping skills in national level team game athletes are gender specific and need separate psychological training for male and female athletes.

Keywords: Coping skills, gender, national level athletes

INTRODUCTION:-

Coping skills are essential for athletes because they help them handle the physical, emotional, and mental challenges of competitive sports. In high-pressure situations, like national or international events, athletes often face stress, performance anxiety, and tough competition. Good coping skills help them stay calm, control their emotions, and remain focused, even when things don't go as planned. These skills not only improve their performance during games but also boost their mental strength and help them deal with the ups and downs of their sports journey. In the long run, coping skills are just as important for an athlete's success and personal growth. They help manage stress from tough training schedules, injuries, and the challenge of balancing sports with other parts of life. By learning healthy ways to cope, athletes can maintain a positive mindset, avoid burnout, and stay passionate about their sport. Coping skills also improve teamwork by helping athletes communicate better, support one another, and resolve conflicts in team settings. Developing these skills is a key part of an athlete's growth, helping them succeed both on and off the field.

Psychologists have long been intrigued by how people manage stressful situations and what shapes their coping skills. Individuals use psychological and behavioral strategies to handle stress and reduce its impact. Common coping methods include problem-solving techniques and emotion-focused approaches, as noted by Folkman and Lazarus (1980).

In sports, coping refers to athletes' mental and behavioral efforts to handle the demands of specific situations or events. This concept is significant in sports psychology, as maintaining consistent high performance often involves intense pressure. Stress and negative emotions can harm performance, whether due to external factors like audience expectations or internal challenges like skill improvement or competing against stronger opponents. For athletes, managing game-related demands and their emotional responses is crucial, and this is often achieved through psychological techniques.

Lazarus developed the Cognitive-Motivational-Relational Theory (CMRT), a process-oriented model that links emotions to cognitive and motivational factors. Reactions like crying or shouting during a stressful match are defense mechanisms, not coping strategies. In sports psychology, effective coping strategies include maintaining motivation, staying positive, using mental imagery, engaging in self-talk, studying opponents' strengths and weaknesses, and managing arousal levels. These methods help athletes perform at their best under pressure.

Smith, Schutz, Smoll, and Ptacek (1995) outlined key points to better understand coping skills in athletes: 1. Performing under pressure: Coping skills help athletes handle the pressure of competition and perform their best when it matters most; 2. Managing worrying thoughts: Athletes with strong coping skills can clear their minds of fears about failure, unexpected mistakes, or others' opinions about their performance, 3. Handling tough situations: During challenging moments in a match or after setbacks in their career, good coping skills help athletes stay optimistic, emotionally stable, and bounce back with determination, 4. Maintaining focus: Athletes with strong coping skills can stay focused on their tasks without being distracted by stress or external pressures, 5. Setting goals and mental preparation: These are crucial aspects of coping skills that help athletes face challenges with a prepared mindset; 6. Building confidence and motivation: Coping skills improve when athletes are motivated to achieve and confident in overcoming difficulties to reach their goals and Accepting positive criticism: Athletes with good coping skills can learn and grow by embracing constructive feedback.

According to researchers like Klint and Weis (1986), failing to cope with stress can lead to poor performance. This highlights the importance of understanding and improving an athlete's coping skills to provide effective psychological support.

The study of coping skills among national levels athletes based on gender carried significant importance under the domain of sports psychology because it is beneficial in preparing gender sensitive psychological training program. Hence the present study was planned.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE :

Pensgaard and Ursin (1998) studied how elite athletes cope with stress during high-pressure situations. They surveyed 69 Norwegian Olympic athletes using open-ended questionnaires to identify stressors and the COPE inventory to analyze coping strategies. Athletes reported that external pressures, expectations to win, and coach behavior were major sources of stress. They noted that the type of stressor had a greater negative impact on performance than the timing of the stress. The athletes primarily used problem-focused strategies and cognitive defenses to manage stress.

Waples (2003) studied the coping abilities of elite and non-elite gymnasts in the USA using the ACSI-28 to gather psychological data. The findings showed that elite gymnasts had better coping skills, focus, and mental abilities, enabling them to handle adverse situations more effectively than non-elite gymnasts.

O'Neil and Steyn (2007) examined how South African endurance athletes cope with environmental stressors, focusing on individual behaviors and experiences. Data from 53 non-elite athletes were collected via a questionnaire. The study revealed that elite endurance athletes view problem-solving as a positive factor for performance and reframe stressors to make them facilitative to their success.

Cosma et al. (2020) examined the relationship between coping strategies and sports performance among 36 volleyball and handball players (17 females, 19 males; mean age 25 ± 4 years). Participants completed the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI), with data analyzed using IBM SPSS v.24 (Cronbach's Alpha $\alpha = .84$). Results showed that "freedom from worry" and "coachability" were the most prevalent coping strategies, while "peaking under pressure" and "coping with adversity" were the least. Male athletes demonstrated better goal-setting, mental preparation, confidence, and motivation to handle stress compared to females ($p = .014$). These findings highlight the importance of incorporating psychological training into athlete and coach education programs.

Bojkowski et al. (2020) in their study concluded that athletes often use task oriented style to manage stress and they are less inclined to use style of avoidance to manage stressful situations.

Kamarudin (2022) explored the relationship between coping strategies and sports performance among 210 athletes (112 males, 98 females) at UiTM Seremban 3 using a quantitative approach. Data were collected through a questionnaire that included demographic details, the ACSI-28, and the psychological performance inventory. Descriptive and Pearson Correlation analyses revealed a significant link between coping strategies and sports performance. The study was conducted via an online survey, and it is recommended that future research be conducted in person for more accurate data collection. Additionally, future studies could explore gender differences in coping strategies and sports performance.

Gunes and Yetim (2023) highlighted how rapidly changing living conditions challenge individuals' physical and mental limits, leading to varying reactions and efforts to adapt. Stress, now a common aspect of daily life, arises from individuals' responses to environmental events. In sports, coping with stress is crucial for performance, while self-confidence—a key personality trait—is vital for athletes to believe in their mental and physical abilities. Lack of self-confidence can lead to fear, anxiety, and poor performance,

whereas confidence fosters determination, responsibility, and enthusiasm. Shaped by factors like family, environment, and education, self-confidence is dynamic and develops over time. This review emphasizes the importance of stress management and self-confidence in athletes for maintaining and enhancing their performance.

OBJECTIVE :

The objective of the present study was to compare coping skills of national level team game athletes based on gender.

HYPOTHESIS :

In the present study, it was hypothesized that coping skills of national level team game athletes will be significantly differentiated by gender.

METHODOLOGY

Sample :

The sample consist of 40 male and 40 female interuniversity/national level athletes chosen from team games namely volleyball, basketball, hockey, handball and cricket. Purposively sampling was used for data collection. The age range of the selected athletes was 18 to 25 years.

Tools :

Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28:

To assess the coping skills of national level team game athletes, the inventory developed by Smith et al. (1995) was deemed suitable. The ACSI-28 is a sport-specific tool designed to evaluate the coping styles of athletes. It consists of 28 items, where respondents rate their opinions using a five-point Likert scale: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree, and Strongly agree. The corresponding numerical values for these responses are 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively. It has six subscales and this inventory is highly reliable and valid.

Procedure :

40 male and 40 female national level team game athletes were selected and ACSI-28 was administered. The responses were scored as per method given in manual and these numerical values were entered in Excel sheet. Independent sample 't' test was applied and the results given in table 1.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION :**Table 1****Comparison of Coping Skills and its Dimensions between National Level Team Game Male and Female Athletes**

Variables	National level Male Athletes			National Level Female Athletes			t
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	
Coping with adversity	50	13.20	2.00	50	8.50	2.28	9.77**
Peaking under pressure	50	12.40	2.20	50	9.82	2.60	4.77**
Goal setting and mental preparation	50	10.27	3.35	50	10.50	2.23	0.35 ^{NS}
Concentration	50	13.02	2.48	50	11.82	2.55	2.13*
Freedom from worry	50	13.17	2.14	50	12.15	2.77	1.84 ^{NS}
Confidence and Achievement Motivation	50	11.52	2.82	50	8.00	1.48	6.97**
Coachability	50	9.80	2.37	50	9.90	2.35	0.18 ^{NS}
Overall Coping Skills	50	83.40	8.92	50	70.70	5.55	7.64**

*, $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$, ^{NS} Not Significant

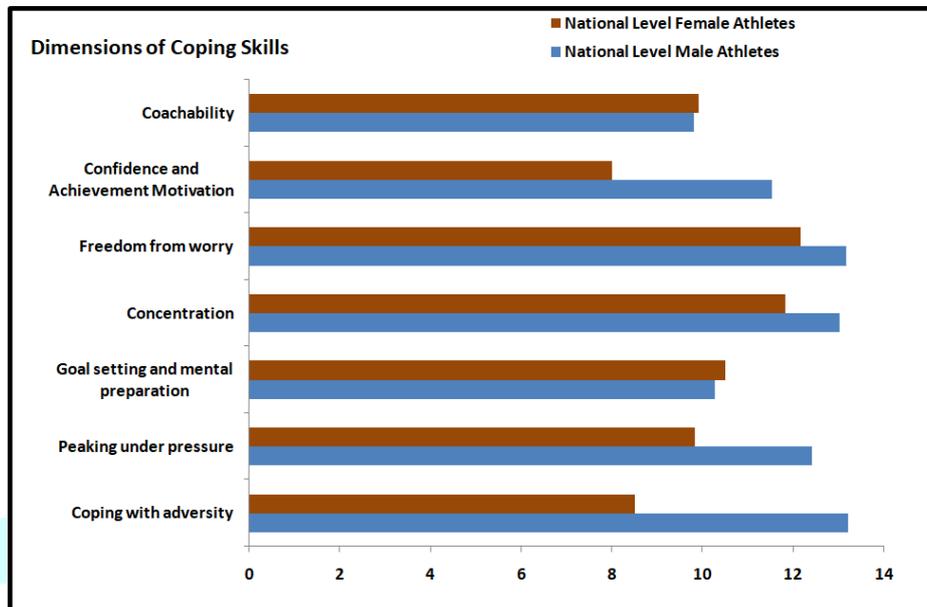
Perusal of table 1 gives following results :

- The national level male team game athletes are significantly more equipped to cope with adverse situations (Mean = 13.20) as compared to national level female team game athletes (Mean = 8.50). The $t=9.77$ was significant at 0.01 level.
- The ability to peak perform at right time was significantly higher in national male team game athletes (Mean = 12.40) as compared to national female team game athletes (Mean = 9.82). The $t=4.77$ was significant at 0.01 level.
- Statistically no significant difference was observed in goal setting and mental preparation dimension of coping skills between national male and female team game athletes. ($t=0.35$, $p > .05$)
- The level of concentration was found to be significantly higher in national male team game athletes (Mean=13.02) as compared to national female team game athletes (Mean=11.82). The $t=2.13$ is significant at .05 level.
- Statistically no significant difference was observed on freedom from worry dimension of coping skills between national male and female team game athletes. ($t=1.84$, $p > .05$)
- The confidence in abilities and motivation to achieve was found to be significantly higher in national male team game athletes (Mean = 11.52) as compared to national female team game athletes (Mean = 8.00). The $t=6.97$ was significant at .01 level.

- Statistically no significant difference was observed on coachability dimension of coping skills between national male and female team game athletes. ($t=0.18, p>.05$)

Fig. 1

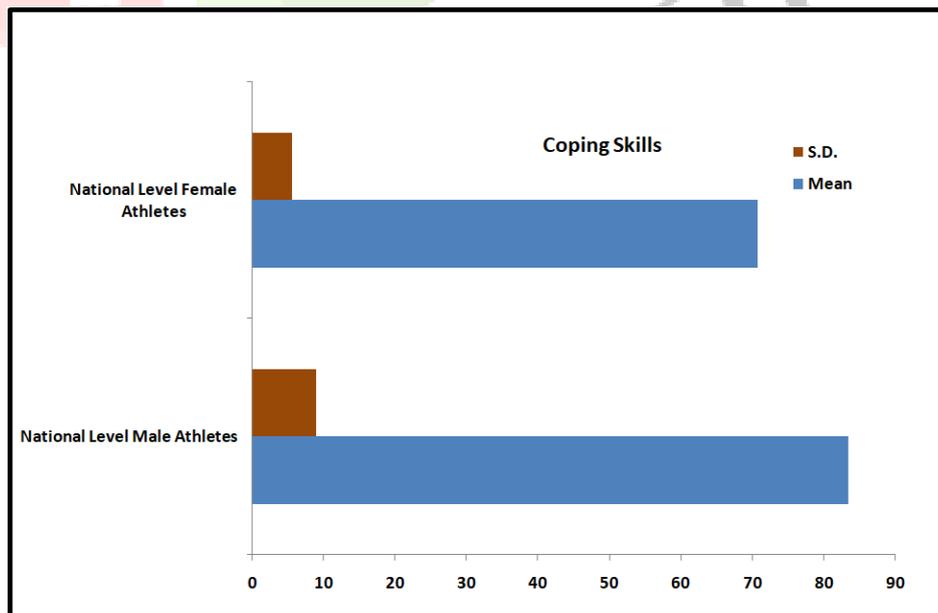
Comparison of Dimensions of Coping Skills between National Level Male and Female Team Game Athletes



- National level male team game athletes exhibited significantly superior coping skills (Mean = 83.40) as compared to national level female team game athletes (Mean = 70.70). The $t=7.64$ was statistically significant at .01 level.

Fig. 2

Comparison of Coping Skills between National Level Male and Female Team Game Athletes



One possible reason of this result could be the different social expectations and pressures placed on male and female athletes. Men may experience a higher level of encouragement to demonstrate resilience and emotional control, which could contribute to the development of superior coping strategies.

CONCLUSION:

It was concluded that coping skills in national level team game athletes are gender specific and need separate psychological training for male and female athletes.

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