



A Comparison of Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) Among Multi-Level Athletes of District Poonch, J&K

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Abstract: Stress is a natural part of competitive sports and greatly affects athletes' performance and mental health. This study investigates the perceived stress levels among athletes of different levels of games from district Poonch, focusing on regional differences and levels of stress. This study included 30 players of different levels of games from the district of Poonch. Data were collected using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983) to measure the stress levels of athletes. The findings show that national players almost never have high stress, state players sometimes or often have stress, and district players often have high stress. The study shows that sports clubs in districts like Poonch affect players' stress. Additional support systems are required. Training for mental strength, better facilities, and mental help lowers stress and improves performance.

Index Terms - Perceived Stress, athletes of different levels of games, Comparing players mindset and stress.

I. INTRODUCTION

Stress is a predictable and complex phenomenon in competitive sports, with profound implementations for performance of the athletes, mental health, and overall well-being (Lazarus, 2000). Perceived stress is a subjective experience which varies among individuals and arises from multiple sources, including competition pressure, performance expectations, and personal goals (Weinberg & Gould, 2015) it is a "measure of the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful". Due to highly competitive environment and pressure among athletes, the subjective evaluation of the stressors an individual encounter, has been identified as a critical factor in understanding how athletes respond to the demands of their sport, (Cohen et. al, 1983). Chiu et al. (2016) also reported that the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) is a reliable and useful tool for measuring stress among athletes and non-athletes. The relationship between stress and athletic performance has been widely studied across various sports, with research indicating that stress levels can vary significantly based on factors such as competition level, training intensity, and regional or cultural differences (Hanton, Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005). Athletes may exhibit less pronounced physiological stress responses during stressful situations than non-athletes because of their regular exposure to competitive pressure (Verner et al., 2010). Galambos et al. (2005) reported that psychological stress may increase the likelihood of injury among athletes. Furthermore, among athletes who had experienced a serious injury, the relationship between perceived stress and perceived social support was found to be strongly associated with lower life satisfaction (Malinauskas, 2010). Similarly, Surujlal et al. (2013) found that the perceived stress levels of student-athletes, along with the coping mechanisms of freedom from anxiety and goal-setting/mental preparation,

were significant predictors of life satisfaction.. Athletes usually have many thoughts in their minds when they enter the field. They work hard to give their best and often feel nervous about losing the game. They also want to make their coaches, family, and friends proud. Andersen and Williams (1988) reported that high stress levels may increase the risk of sports injuries and poor athletic performance. High stress can affect their confidence and make it difficult to perform well. A little stress can help athletes do better because it keeps them alert focused and ready, but if stress gets too high it can make an athlete feel less confident, perform poorly during competitions and not do well in the game, additionally, it can leave them extremely depressed and exhausted. The present study tries to find out the stress athletes feel when they play at Poonch different sports clubs and the ways it changes their performance; The study compares experienced national players handling pressure well whereas State and District level players still learning to deal with stress in their particular games.

II. HYPOTHESIS

According to the study's hypothesis, athletes competing at the District, State, and National levels will show different levels of perceived stress, which were analyzed using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). Due to the different pressures, training environments, and competitive experiences that athletes from all levels experience in District Poonch, it is expected that these differences will be observed. District-level athletes are expected to experience the highest stress because they have less experience, limited facilities, and less exposure to big matches. State-level athletes may experience moderate stress as they are still learning how to stay calm under pressure but have some experience from higher competitions. National-level athletes are expected to have the lowest stress because they have faced tougher challenges before, have better coaching, and are usually more mentally strong, and not all athletes will remain relaxed or stress-free during competitions. Many players, especially those at the district level, may show higher stress due to fear of making mistakes, pressure to perform, and low self-confidence. The purpose of this hypothesis is to understand whether competition level, training quality, and experience influence the amount of stress athletes feel and to determine whether these factors explain why some athletes stay calm while others get stressed during games and practice sessions.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study intended to assess the perceived stress levels among athletes participating at different competitive levels in District Poonch. The methodology includes details on the selection of subjects, research design and data collection, and statistical analysis.

3.1 Selection of Subjects

The participants in this study were selected through purposive sampling from different sports clubs in the Poonch District. A total of sixty (30) athletes participated at the national, state, and district levels. Before collecting any information, the purpose of the study was explained to every player, and their consent was obtained without any pressure. No one was excluded because of gender or financial background. This study focused on active athletes who regularly trained and participated in sports events within the district. To ensure fair selection, players from both rural and urban areas were included.

3.2 Procedure and Research Design

This research adopted a survey-based approach in District Poonch of J&K to evaluate the stress levels of athletes competing at different levels of sports. Data were gathered using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) questionnaire, originally developed by Cohen et al. (1983). There are ten items in total, and items 4, 5, 7, and 8 are scored by reversing the answers. The choices varied from Never to Very often. The questions focused on perceived stress during the last month, for example, "How often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life? All athletes were informed of the study's objectives and assured that their answers would be treated privately before data collection. The questionnaire included several sections on stress-related topics and simple personal information. To ensure the honesty and reliability of the responses, all participants filled out the form on their own behalf. After collecting all the polls, the data were carefully recorded and checked to ensure accuracy and completeness. The data gathered has been investigated to compare athletes' stress levels at different competition level. All legal criteria were carried out by the research project. The entire research method

was carried out openly and carefully, every person freely participated, and all the data they provided were maintained completely personal.

3.3 Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, were used to summarize the basic details of the 30 athletes. To compare the perceived stress levels among the three groups of athletes at the National, State, District levels, a one-way ANOVA test was applied. This test was used to determine whether there were any significant differences in the mean stress scores among the groups. The results showed that district-level athletes reported higher stress than state- and national-level players. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$ for all tests, and the results were interpreted carefully to understand the trend of stress in relation to the competition level. The analysis provided valuable insights into how stress varies according to experience and performance level among athletes in District Poonch.

3.4 Data Collection

The athletes were informed before data collection that they were safe. They were asked to provide honest answers, and we assured them that their answers would remain private. To gather data, we used the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) 10 items Likert-type scale. We conducted a survey to determine the stress level of players in the last month, which was easily completed by players between the ages of eighteen to twenty-five (18 and 25). Everyone was able to understand it because it was written in simple, clear language. They give answers based on their feelings in the last month. When they were confused while filling the form, we helped them. When the survey was finished, we added all the scores and put the players into three groups: low stress, moderate stress, and high stress.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics of National, State and District Level Players

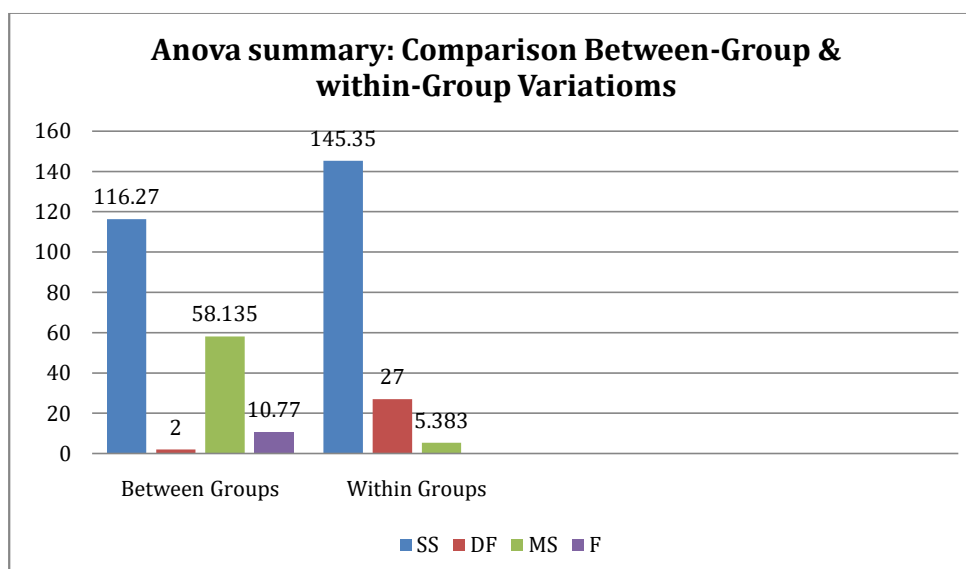
Level	N	Mean	SD
National	10	15.8	4.85
State	10	17.1	3.84
District	10	19.5	1.65

The sampling method used was purposive sampling, as the selection required athletes to have completed a specific performance level. The research investigation found that each of the three categories of athletes had different levels of stress.

Table 4.2. Analysis of Variance among National, State and District Level Players.

Groups	SS	DF	MS	F-Ratio	Sig*
Between Groups	116.27	2	58.135	10.77	0.05*
Within Groups	145.35	27	5.383		

SS (sum of Square), DF (Degree of Freedom), MS (Mean Square)*



The ANOVA analysis shows a statistically significant difference among the three levels (National, State, District) because the p-value (0.05) is less than 0.05. This means that stress scores were not the same across groups.

1. **National-level athletes:** A large number of participants hardly experienced any kind of stress. They were calm and focused on their tasks. They developed the ability to maintain calmness and focus when under pressure as they were involved in multiple tough games in the past.
2. **State-level competitors:** These athletes were growing stronger, but they were still dealing with some pressure while playing. Many individuals occasionally experience stress, while others experience it more frequently. Because they realized the value of maintaining calm under pressure, they missed trust in the abilities of players at the national level.
3. **District-level competitors:** These athletes were still learning and generally participated in major events for the first time. Many athletes suffer high levels of stress throughout practice and competition. They lacked confidence because they feared making mistakes or falling.

According to the investigation, playing video games more often can make people feel calmer and less nervous. Athletes grow stronger and more confident in their abilities as they practice and compete more. According to the results, athletes participating at the district level had higher stress levels throughout practice and performance. To make it easier for these athletes to perform better and feel safer, coaches should teach them skills to handle stress.

Discussion

According to this study, athletes participating at the National level showed better emotional control and mental confidence compared to those participating at the State and District levels. When the other athletes still struggled to keep their calm and focused, they were prepared to stay calm and think clearly under pressure. While the younger district-level athletes were nervous before games and constantly worried that they could make a mistake, they maintained their cool and felt comfortable. Stress is not always bad for athletes. A small amount of stress can help them stay focused and perform better in practice and competitions. But too much stress can make it hard to think clearly and take good decisions during the game. Smith (1986) explained that continuous stress may negatively affect athletes' mental and physical performance. Coaches and trainers may explain to players fundamental abilities like deep breathing and relaxation of the body that will help athletes handle the stress, as well as calm during games. Athletes may also benefit from positive self-talk and mental preparation by saying themselves things that are beneficial and visualizing themselves performing well. Before the games, they exercise and relax. These help them to stay calm when the games become challenging. Gustafsson et al. (2011) stated that long-term stress may increase burnout among athletes.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study shows that a player's stress changes with experience, and the skill of more experienced players usually stays and is calmer than that of beginners. National-level players had very little stress and remained calm. State-level players experienced some stress. District-level players had the most stress and were more nervous. The study shows that when players become good at their sport and play more, they usually feel less stress. The stress scale is a simple and useful tool for assessing the amount of stress players feel during games and practice. Coaches should train players' bodies and minds together, as this helps players to play better and stay calm, especially in big district-level games, and play much better and do well in their future games. Trainers provide mental preparation alongside physical exercise because sports players must control their internal pressure during games. Specific schemes for regulating anxiety and improving self-assurance are provided to participants at the district level. Experts claim that yoga, meditation, and methods for resting the mind find a place in normal exercise routines so that sports players reach a calm state. Greater exposure to contests is given to sports players because facing opponents frequently lowers the fear felt during matches. Scholar's study larger groups of people and various athletic types in the coming years while they seek more accurate findings.

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