ANXIETY LEVELS AND GENDER DIFFERENCES IN INDIAN UNIVERSITY ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT

Main purpose of this study was to investigate pre-competitive anxiety of Indian University athletes. The sample consisted of 94 university athletes (M=51, F=43). Instrument used for data collection was the sports competition anxiety test (SCAT). Questionnaires were administered to these athletes one hour before the actual competition schedule in a bid to get genuine responses during the 66th All India Inter University Athletic Championship. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean, S.D. and t-value. The level of confidence was set at 0.05. Results revealed significance differences in changes of anxiety levels of these male and female athletes (t=15.21 and 18.81, respectively). There were no significance differences between male and female athletes (t=0.84). Indian university coaches were advised to prepare their athletes psychologically, so as to make them mentally ready for competitions.

INTRODUCTION

The most talked about psychological variable affecting athletes during competition is anxiety. Anxiety is generally defined as a psychobiological emotional state or reaction that can be distinguished most clearly from other emotions such as anger or sadness by its experiential qualities. It can be manifested physiologically (sweaty palms, increased heart rate and respiration) or cognitively (worry, self-doubt). It is now well-known that athletes who experience high anxiety have poorer performances than those who do not report experiencing high levels of anxiety. An anxiety state consists of unpleasant feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry, and activation of the autonomic nervous system. The physiological manifestations of anxiety generally include increased blood pressure, rapid heart rate (palpitations or tachycardia), sweating, dryness of mouth, nausea, vertigo, irregularities in breathing, muscle tension, and musculo-skeletal disturbances such as restlessness, tremors, and feelings of weakness (Spielberger and Rickman, 1990).

The contemporary sport anxiety literature indicates that there are two dimensions of anxiety, namely trait and state anxiety. Spielberger (1972) described state anxiety as, "an existing or current emotional state characterized by feelings of apprehension and tension". In comparison, "trait anxiety is a predisposition to perceive certain events as threatening or non-threatening..."
across situations" (Spielberger, 1972). A trait is part of the personality, which influences behavior. State anxiety can be seen as a multidimensional psychological construct. Martens et al. (1990) opined these multidimensional facets of state anxiety can be grouped into two broad concepts expectations about success or by negative self-evaluation (Craft et al, 2003). A form of cognitive anxiety, worry, has been shown to consistently decrease performance (Sarason, 1984). Correspondingly, Burton (1988) found anxiety to be related to performance in a negative trend, in swimmers. In comparison, somatic anxiety is the physiological and affective element of anxiety that develop directly from arousal (e.g., increased heart rate, increased respiration, clammy hands, stomach butterflies, dry mouth and tense muscles). In other words, somatic anxiety is the component that reflects the perceptions of the psychological stress to the physiological response (Craft et al, 2003). Somatic anxiety has been shown to impair performance on tasks involving precision and accuracy (Sarason, 1984). Burton (1988) has indicated that somatic anxiety is related to performance in an inverted U relationship.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The instrument used for data collection was the sports competition anxiety test (SCAT), developed by Martens (1977). This questionnaire consists of 15 statements related to competition situation. The test is self-administered and each item has a three-point scale: (a) hardly ever, (b) some time, (c) often. Five spurious items were included in the inventory to direct some attention to other elements of competition.

One hundred questionnaires were administered through trained research assistants during the 66th All India Inter University Athletic Championship (2006). Ninety-seven forms were retrieved, out of which three were not properly filled. Sample for the study, therefore, consisted of Ninety-four university athletes (M=51, F=43). The test was administered about one hour before the actual competition schedule in a bid to get genuine responses. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean, S.D. and t-value. The level of confidence was set at 0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

<p>| TABLE 1. MEANS AND T-TEST VALUES OF MALES AND FEMALES WITH HIGH AND LOW ANXIETY LEVELS |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Anxiety Level</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>t-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25.79</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>15.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15.91</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26.50</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>18.81*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16.29</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant at 0.05 level
Table 1 shows differences in anxiety levels of these male university athletes were significant. Similarly significant differences can be seen in levels of anxiety among these female university athletes. This might be connected with the fact this was a national level competition and many athletes were probably afraid of being negatively evaluated by others (social evaluation). There is usually serious pressure from coaches, as well as other university administrators with comments such as "you are my only hope of winning any medals; during the last competition we won so and so numbers of medals and must not do less this time around” can put on edge. It could also be these athletes were afraid of failure at such a major competition. According to Cox (1994), anxiety could occur if perceived demands were not balanced by the athlete's perception of his/her ability to respond.

In test anxiety literature, Spence and Spence (1966), Misner (1973) and Milne (1971) have confirmed that high, anxious subjects would do more poorly than low anxious subjects and that the low anxious subjects and the medium anxious subjects tended to improve their performance; high-level anxiety has a detrimental effect upon motor performance of young children.

**TABLE 2. MEANS AND T-TEST VALUES OF MALES AND FEMALES ANXIETY LEVELS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>t-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PCA</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>21.53</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>-0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>22.46</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant at 0.05 level

From Table 2, comparison of anxiety levels of male and female athletes showed no significant differences. This suggested gender was not a predictor of pre-competitive anxiety among these university athletes. It showed be noted, however, anxiety of both male and female athletes was high one hours before competitions. This agreed with findings of Martens et al. (1990), who reported pre-competitive anxiety started relatively high, and remained high and stable as time-to-event approached. It could be deduced proximity of competitions rather than gender, was probably responsible for relatively high anxiety levels of these male and female university athletes. Conclusion

From the foregoing, coaches in Indian universities are advised to prepare their athletes psychologically, so as to make them mentally ready for competitions. The tendency of high pre-competition anxiety is harmful to an athlete. High levels of anxiety usually result in poor performance; therefore such athletes should be given special attention. Thus, the duty of a coach or a sport psychologist is to help an athlete to cope with the state of anxiety or make this kind of state less overwhelming, in order to achieve better performance.
REFERENCES


