

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMPETITION ANXIETY AND FEAR OF FAILURE AMONG SPORTSMEN AND SPORTSWOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To determine the relationship between competition anxiety and fear of failure among sportsmen and sportswomen.

Methodology: It was a descriptive observational study, conducted from February 2012 to January 2013, consisting of athletes from public and private sector colleges and universities of District Peshawar, Mardan and Nowshera. Sports Competition Anxiety Test (SCAT) and Performance Fear Appraisal Inventory (PFAI) were used. T-test was used to assess the gender differences of competition anxiety and fear of failure. P value <0.05 was considered significant.

Results: The sample consisted of 200 athletes, 100 males and 100 females. The mean age of the sample was 22.43 ±4.82 years. The mean SCAT score in the study was 28.57 ±05.38. It was significantly higher in male athletes as compared to female (p value =.004). The mean PFAI score was 70.01 ±20.58. Male athletes showed significantly higher values as compared to their female counterparts with p value <.01. There was a strong positive correlation between competition anxiety and fear of failure with correlation values ranging from .839 to .985 and P value <.001.

Conclusion: There was strong positive correlation between competition anxiety and fear of failure. Male athletes have higher competition anxiety and fear of failure as compared to their female counterparts.

Key Words: Sportsmen, Sportswomen, Competition anxiety, Fear of failure

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INTRODUCTION

Sports psychology has grown by leaps and bound over the last couple of decades. It is cardinal for the mental wellbeing of the athletes. It can help bring improvement in athletic performance by eliminating or reducing the mental impediments to good sporting performance, hence allowing athletes to reach the full physical potential^{1,2}. Sports psychology first originated in the late 19th century. Triplett conducted first experiment to study psychological aspects and its effects on sporting activities³. Davis et al⁴ concluded that competitiveness in sports lead to improvement in performance.

Professional as well as amateur athletes, highly experienced or relatively inexperienced, all feel anxious before a competition. The anxiety experienced in competitive sports is termed as competition anxiety. The physical symptoms when an athlete feel anxious includes pounding of heart, sweaty hands or weakness in knees. What differs between an elite athlete as compared to an average performer is how they cope with such situations. In other words, stress is inherent with competitive sports but mental training can teach an

athlete how to cope with it hence decreasing its debilitating effects on performance. It is this mental training, the primary domain of sports psychologist, that can help an athlete display their full potential on the field for higher success.

Competition anxiety and sports performance are interrelated to each other. Sportsmen sometimes experience anxiety before starting the game and if this anxiety makes hindrances to perform well then it is considered a serious problem⁵. One of the major hypotheses of sports psychology researchers was that cognitive aspect of anxiety serves to draw attention off the relevant task cues and this leads to the wide held concept that it affects performance negatively⁶.

Fear of failure is motive that is best described an evasion based intent in the realm of achievement. A more accurate definition could be derived from the initial research of Murray⁷ and then from the work of Atkinson⁸. Fear of failure can be defined as the dispositional tendency to orient toward and to seek to avoid failure in achievement settings because one feels shame on failure. An important distinction has been made at this

point that fear of failure does not mean that "failure" is feared in itself, rather it is the "remorse" that accompanies the failure⁹. Hence, in order to grasp the concept of fear of failure it is critical to know the dynamics of emotion of shame.

Fear of failure is basically avoidance of the anticipatory emotion of shame while foreseeing failure in a particular daunting situation or at a specific demanding task¹⁰. A more recent understanding however refutes the earlier uni-dimensional construct of this concept. The multi-dimensional theory of fear of failure stated that "fear of failure is the tendency to appraise threat to the achievement of personally meaningful goals when one fails in the performance, that failure is perceived as threatening and feared, by individuals who associate it with aversive consequences"¹⁰. Research has indicated five views about the repercussions of failure, which are hence tied to threat appraisal and due to this appraisal such repercussions are then feared. In order to have a measuring tool for assessment of their concepts of fear of failure, the authors refined the performance failure appraisal inventory or PFAI, which measured five types of fear of failure⁶. Like competition anxiety, fear of failure is also detrimental for athletic performance. A psychological risk of fear of failure is that it can inhibit an athlete from never reaching their full potential⁸.

Sports psychology is a relatively new field especially in the developing countries including Pakistan where the psychological attributes of athletes has rarely been studied. This study will explore competition anxiety and fear of failure, which are of central importance while dealing with sports psychology. It will not only shed light on the mental characteristics of our athletes but will also help improve their athletic performance. Studying the correlation between competition anxiety and fear of failure may enable sports psychologists in reducing the mental impediments in sporting performances.

METHODOLOGY

It was a descriptive observational study consisting of athletes from public and private sector colleges and universities of District Peshawar, Mardan and Nowshera. The study was conducted from February 2012 to January 2013 after approval from the ethics committee of University of Peshawar. Approval was also taken from concerned authorities of all the colleges and universities involved in the study. Purposive sampling technique was utilized in this study. Sample consisted of 200 athletes with equal representation from both genders, sportswomen (n=100) and sportsmen (n=100). All of them were matched for age, educational and socioeconomic status. Subjects included in the sample had age ranging from 18 to 27 years. They must have been involved in team sports such as cricket, hockey, football or volley ball for the last 3 years. Those who were under

psychiatric treatment or taking any drugs were excluded from the sample. Athletes who were already practicing in any relaxation techniques were also excluded from sample. Semi structured interview was conducted on each subject to get demographic information including age, gender, education, socio-economic background, duration of sports participation and past psychiatric history. Sport Competition Anxiety Test (SCAT) was developed by Martens⁹. This test measures the tendency of an athlete to experience anxiety when competing in a sport. Test scoring is based on 15 questions that ask individuals how they feel when competing in sports and games. Each item is answered on a three-point scale. Reliability of the scale is .79.

Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (PFAI) was developed by Conroy et al¹¹ in 2003. The 25 items scales measures fear of failure in participants. Test retest reliability of the scale is 0.80. It is composed of five subscales of failing: "(a) fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment, (b) fear of devaluing one's self-estimate, (c) fear of having an uncertain future, (d) fear of important others losing interest and (e) fear of upsetting important others". Participants responded to items on a five point Likert Scale ranging from do not believe at all (-2) to believe 50% of the time (0) to believe 100% of the time (+2). Construct validity evidence has been found for this inventory. Internal consistency estimates range from .69 to .90.

In order to assess the respective psychological parameters, SCAT and PFAI were administered. The data was collected and analyzed using SPSS version 20. The t-test was used in order to assess the gender differences of competition anxiety and fear of failure while Pearson's correlation was conducted to assess if there is any correlation between high competition anxiety and fear of failure. P value <0.05 was considered significant.

RESULTS

Out of 200 athletes, 100 were males and 100 were females. The mean age was 22.43 ± 04.82 years (range 18-27 years). A total of 99 (49.50%) athletes were graduation level students while 53 (26.50%) were master level students. 60.50% of the participants were involved in playing cricket (Table 1). The mean SCAT score was 28.57 ± 05.38 . Sportsmen showed higher mean SCAT scores as compared to sportswomen. This difference proved to be highly significant with t-value 2.91 and $p < .01$. Effect size was medium as $d = .4514$. The mean PFAI score was 70.01 ± 20.58 . Male athletes showed significantly higher values as compared to their female counterparts with p value $< .01$ (Table 2). Statistical analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between competition anxiety and fear of failure with correlation values ranging from .839 to .985 and p value $< .001$ (Table 3).

Table 1: Frequency and percentages of demographic variables (n=200)

| Variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 100 | 50 |
| Female | 100 | 50 |
| Education | | |
| Intermediate | 45 | 22.5 |
| Graduation | 99 | 49.5 |
| Master | 53 | 26.5 |
| M.Phil. | 3 | 1.5 |
| Games | | |
| Cricket | 121 | 60.50 |
| Hockey | 40 | 20.00 |
| Football | 22 | 11.00 |
| Volleyball | 17 | 08.50 |

Table 2: Mean scores, standard deviation and t-values on PFAI subscales with respect to gender (n=200)

| Scales | Male (n= 100) | | Female (n= 100) | | t(198) | p | 95%CI | | Cohen's D |
|-------------|---------------|------|-----------------|------|--------|------|-------|------|-----------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | LL | UL | |
| SCAT | 29.6 | 5.48 | 27.49 | 5.06 | 2.91 | .004 | .69 | 3.64 | 0.414 |
| PFAI | | | | | | | | | |
| FSE | 20.60 | 6.30 | 17.93 | 6.27 | 3.00 | .003 | .915 | 4.42 | .426 |
| FDSE | 12.05 | 3.16 | 10.82 | 3.12 | 2.769 | .006 | .354 | 2.10 | .393 |
| FUF | 10.85 | 3.22 | 12.06 | 3.57 | 2.51 | .013 | .259 | 2.16 | .357 |
| FIOLI | 15.04 | 4.52 | 12.72 | 4.47 | 3.64 | .000 | 1.06 | 3.57 | .519 |
| FUIO | 15.16 | 4.53 | 12.79 | 4.19 | 3.83 | .000 | 1.15 | 3.58 | .545 |

Note: SCAT= Sports Competition Anxiety Test, PFAI= Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory, FSE= Fear of Experiencing Shame & Embarrassment, FDSE= Fear of Devaluing One's Self Esteem, FUF= Fear of Having an Uncertain Future, FIOLI= Fear of Important Others Losing Interest, FUIO= Fear of Upsetting Important Others. CI = Confidence interval; LL= Lower limit; UL= Upper limit

Table 3: Correlation between performance failure appraisal inventory and its sub-scales with sports competition anxiety test (n=200)

| PFAI and Sub-scales | SCAT |
|---------------------|--------|
| PFAI | .985** |
| FSE | .928** |
| FDSE | .867** |
| FUF | .889** |
| FIOLI | .916** |
| FUIO | .937** |

Note: **p<.001, SCAT=Sport Competition Anxiety Test, PFAI= Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory, FSE=Fear of Experiencing Shame & Embarrassment, FDSE= Fear of Devaluing One's Self Esteem, FUF= Fear of Having an Uncertain Future, FIOLI=Fear of Important Others Losing Interest, FUIO=Fear of Upsetting Important Others.

DISCUSSION

Our findings revealed a correlation ranging from 0.839 to 0.985 between high competition anxiety and fear of failure. This shows that there was a strong positive correlation between competition anxiety and fear of failure, which is in line with previous findings¹¹⁻¹⁴. Conroy et al⁶ utilized performance fear appraisal inventory while studying multi-dimensional fear of failure in 544 college students. The PFAI scores were reduced to 25 items. The sub-scales for fear of failure included fear of upsetting important others, fear of an uncertain future, shame and embarrassment, devaluing one's self esteem and fear of important others losing interest. Results showed that there was an association between competition anxiety and fear of failure. Furthermore, it was noted that fear of failure was also associated with somatic anxiety, cognitive disruption and higher levels of worry.

Bakhtiary et al¹⁵ studied the relationship between fear of failure and experience with competitive state anxiety in Iranian Taekwondo premier league. The total number of athletes who completed the survey was 48. Performance fear appraisal inventory was utilized to measure fear of failure while competitive state anxiety inventory-2 was used for measuring competitive state anxiety. Results indicated positive correlation between fear of failure and competitive state anxiety regarding both somatic as well as cognitive aspects and hence favoring our findings. Gould et al¹⁶ had described fear of failure as an important factor contributing to state anxiety. The other dimension of competition anxiety namely its cognitive aspect has been described to have a similar effect. They noted that 11% of the athletes were concerned over evaluation by others and this was a source of stress for them. In other words, this study showed that the athletes demonstrated a type of fear of failure that is measured by the performance fear appraisal inventory as a source of stress.

Gould et al¹⁷ showed that individuals who had a history of failing demonstrated higher levels of cognitive anxiety. This finding was reported after studying the relationship between competitive state anxiety inventory 2 sub-scales and performance. A total of 39 police officers involved in pistol shooting performance were evaluated. Another study showed that wrestlers who were more successful showed lower level of competition anxiety as compared to those who had experienced more failure¹⁸. More recently, the work of McGregor et al¹⁹ showed that the negative and positive influences of failure and success in sports accumulated to build up competitive trait anxiety over the course of an athletic career.

Athanas²⁰ conducted a study consisting of 145 epee fencers. Results showed that athletes who had higher

general fear of failure were more likely to experience high cognitive anxiety before the fencing tournament. In other words, fencers who had high fear of failure also had elevated cognitive anxiety prior to start of competition. Multiple regression analysis revealed fear of failure as a predictor of cognitive anxiety ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$). On the other hand, regression analysis failed to show fear of failure as a predictor of somatic anxiety.

LIMITATIONS

It is prudent to consider limitations of this study. First of all the sample size was small considering magnitude of the problem. The current security and economic situation led to limited sporting events during study period hence limiting the sample size considerably. The sample was not diverse since it consisted of athletes from local colleges and universities. More resources are needed to conduct a similar study at national level, which will not only diversify the sample but also furnish some vital data, which can help improve the athletic performances of our athletes at national and international sporting events.

CONCLUSION

A strong positive correlation existed between competition anxiety and fear of failure. Athletes showing elevated competition anxiety levels also exhibited higher fear of failure. Sportsmen exhibit higher level of competition anxiety as compared to their female counterparts. Male athletes had more fear of failure as compared to female athletes.

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CONTRIBUTORS

RA conceived the idea, planned the study and drafted the manuscript. RG helped acquisition of data and did statistical analysis. EI critically revised the manuscript and supervised the study. All authors contributed significantly to the submitted manuscript.