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Exploration study on stress and coping styles between college athletes and non-athletes

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the differences in stress levels and coping styles between college athletes and non-athletes. The sample of the present study comprised 100 college students (50 athletes and 50 nonathletes). Coping style developed by Hamby, Grych, & Banyard, (2013) and perceived stress scale (PSS) developed by Cohen, Karmarck and Mermelstein (1983) were administered to all the samples for the purpose of data collection. The data were statistically analysed by using t-test. The result showed that college athletes did not differ from non-athletes in their stress level. But on coping style the result revealed that athletes are significantly differing from non-athletes.

Keywords: Athletes, stress, coping, college students

Introduction

College is a stressful time for many students as they go through the process of adapting to new educational and environments. As stressors accumulate an individual's ability to cope or readjust can be overtaxed, depleting their physical and psychological resources. Stress has been identified as crucial in sport, influencing performance as well as social functioning (Jones & Hardy, 1990). College students are put under intense pressure and have stressors surrounding them in every aspect of their lives. Freshmen especially are thrown from an atmosphere where they have existed in for eighteen years into a brand new college environment where nothing is familiar (Bamuhair *et al.* 2015) ^[5]; Wilson & Pritchard, (2005). Suddenly they are responsible for a multitude of things they may not have had to be responsible for before. These include, but are not limited to: picking a schedule of classes, making sure their major is the best one for them, making new friends and maintaining existing relationships, figuring out how to manage their time effectively, deal with finances, feeding themselves, getting their homework done, and if they have a job, working in addition to going to classes (Bamuhair *et al.* 2015) ^[5]; Wilson & Pritchard, (2005). With each of those responsibilities comes a multitude of stressors. Moeini *et al.* (2008) found that, as an individual reported experiencing higher stress levels, he/she reported having lower self-efficacy, believing in his/her ability to manage those high stress levels, which, in turn, had a negative impact on mental health status. Students with high levels of stress reported lower self-esteem and also viewed themselves as less healthy (Pierceall & Keim, 2007).

Adolescents and college students tend not to have had enough variety of life experiences to establish effective coping mechanisms, so there is potential for negative effects on their mental and physical health (Ben-Zur, 2009); Day & Livingstone, 2001; Moeini *et al.* 2008) ^[6]. At most universities, both student athletes and non-athletes have the same relative academic stressors in their lives, but it is possible that they have different sources of stress. College athletes report more sources of stress in their life than non-athletes (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). These sources of stress include: time management, missing class due to team travel burnout, fear of failure, dealing with team dynamics, anxiety, depression, and self-esteem issues (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005).

There is evidence that athletes report higher numbers of stressors in their lives and higher levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic stressors (Alsentali & Anshel, 2015) ^[3] than their non-athletic counterparts (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005).

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Unlike non-athletes, student athletes have to deal with the pressures of participating in a sport, the pressures of performing well academically to stay on the team, and the other stressors faced by nonstudent athletes.

Currently, there are strides being taken to ensure athletes have a way to decompress after stressful events, become mentally prepared before a significant game or match, and be healthy as a whole not just physiologically (Rumbold, Fletcher, & Daniels, 2012). Sports psychologists are in high-demand as professional teams realize the value of having their players mentally healthy. They train the mind just as any sports trainer helps train a specific area of the body (Rumbold, Fletcher, & Daniels, 2012). Athletes in general are also more prone to what (Lazarus and Folkman as cited in (Gan & Anshel, 2009) refer to as acute stress, which occurs suddenly and is perceived to be unpleasant and can result from executing the wrong play, losing, injury, poor performance, negative comments from coaches or teammates, and bad calls made by referees (Alsentali & Anshel, 2015; Gan & Anshel, 2009; Holt & Mandigo, 2004; Nicholls *et al.* 2006) [3].

There have been relatively few studies comparing student-athletes' stress levels and coping styles to those students that are not involved in athletics. (Mark Anshel 1997, 2000) [2] has dedicated his research to studying how athletes, at all levels, handle their stress levels and what coping mechanisms they employ given certain stress. There are different aspects to athletes' selection of coping styles and coping effectiveness of: perceived stress level, perceived controllability of the stressor, burnout, physical activity level, and mindset (Alsentali & Anshel, 2015) [3]. Not everyone has the same coping strategies to deal with stress in their lives and not all athletes have the same coping strategies (Anshel *et al.* 2000) [1]; Azizi, 2011) [4].

Overall coping effectiveness is related to what kind of coping styles an individual employs for different situations (Nicholls *et al.*2006). Coping with stressful events as a whole is not something that happens one time, it is an on-going process, (Nicholls *et al.* 2006). Learning to cope is the same as learning any other basic skill: practice results in better execution. Older, master athletes, tend to use more positive approach coping styles simply because they have less stress associated with their sport as they have successfully mastered the skill associated with their individual sport, (Hoar, Evans, & Link, 2012).

Objectives

The present study has the following objectives

- To identify the stress level of college athletes and non-athletes.
- To find out the coping styles of college athletes and non-athletes.

Hypothesis

H1: Significant differences exist between college athletes and non college athletes in terms of perceived stress.

H2: Significant differences exist between college athletes and non-athletes in terms of coping style.

Methodology

The sample comprised 100 college students (N = 50 athletes and N= 50 non-athletes) studying graduation 2 in different colleges of Nagpur District of Maharashtra. All the college athletes have participated in various State and National level competitions in sport. Participants ranged in age from 18-25 years (mean age= 21.5 years).

Instruments

The following instruments were used for collecting the data from the sample.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

Stress was measured, using Perceived Stress Scale (PPSS), developed by (Cohen, Kamarck and Mermelstein 1983) [7]. PSS has been widely used. Its reliability and validity have been established (Cohen and Williamson, 1988). The scale measures the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised to be stressful. It comprises 10 items. For each item, the respondents are required to score between 0 to 4 (0 for never, 1 for almost never, 2 for sometimes, 3 for fairly often and 4 for very often), Scoring is reversed for item nos. 4, 5, 7 and 8. Scores ranging from 0-13 indicate low stress, 14-27 indicate medium stress and 28-40 indicate high stress.

Coping Scale

Coping styles of athletes and non-athletes was measured by using the coping scale by Hamby, Grych, & Banyard, 2013. There are 13 items in this questionnaire. Each answer category was assigned a value from 4 to 1. Higher scores indicate higher levels of coping. Internal consistencies (coefficient alphas) is found to be (0.91). Validity was established in the main sample with strong correlations with other measures of regulatory strengths, such as Anger Management (r = .57) and Endurance (r = .63), and with measures of well-being, such as Subjective Well-being (r = .53) and Posttraumatic Growth (r = .65).

Procedure

The instruments used in this present study were compiled and printed out in English. The respondents filled up the questionnaire individually in the presence of the researcher in their off college hours.

Analysis and Results

Table 1: Significance of mean difference between athletes and non-athletes on stress

| Groups | N | Mean | Sd | t-value |
|---------------------|----|-------|------|---------|
| Athletes | 50 | 18.80 | 4.95 | 1.03 |
| Non-athletes df= 98 | 50 | 19.86 | 5.24 | |

To study the significance of mean difference between college athletes and non-athletes on perceived stress, t-test was applied. The results revealed that college athletes are not differing from non-athletes on perceived stress. The mean and the standard deviation score of athletes in perceived stress is found to be (M=18.80 and Sd= 4.95). And the mean and standard deviation score of non-athletes on perceived stress is found to be (M=19.86 and Sd= 5.24). It means both athletes and non-athletes are experiencing stress.

Table 2: Significance of mean difference between athletes and non-athletes on coping style

| Groups | N | Mean | Sd | t-value |
|-----------------------------|----|-------|------|---------|
| Athletes | 50 | 38.22 | 3.74 | 3.95** |
| Non-athletes Df = 98, P<.01 | 50 | 34.98 | 4.53 | |

To study the significance of mean difference between college athletes and non-athletes on coping style, t-test was applied. The results revealed that college athletes are significantly differing from non-athletes in their coping style. The mean

and the standard deviation score of athletes on coping style is found to be ($M=38.22$ and $Sd = 3.74$). And the mean and standard deviation score of non-athletes on coping style is found to be ($M=34.98$ and $Sd =4.53$). The t-test is found to be significant at .01 level of significance.

Discussion

The objective of the present study was to find out the stress level of college athletes and non-athletes. In proving the first hypothesis the result is found to be insignificant. The result revealed that the college athletes are not differing from non-athletes in their stress level. There was no significant difference between the two groups in perceived stress levels as both groups are reported stress. Athletes did not report higher levels of stress than non-athletes. There was not a significant difference so both groups reported the same levels of stress in their life. This finding contradicts the finding by Wilson and Pritchard (2005) that athletes report higher stress levels. However, Wilson and Pritchard (2005) found that athletes report a wider variety of stressors and therefore higher stress levels based on each category and this current research focused on overall perceived stress.

The result of the present study showed that athletes are differing from non-athletes in their coping style. The second hypothesis is proved. This means athletes are significantly differing from nonathletes in their coping style. The result could be due to the fact that athletes are facing more stress in day to day life both in the field of study and in sport. They are exposed to variety of situations and handling the crisis in their own way. As a result of which the athletes could able to cope in a better way compared to non-athletes. This finding is supported by the research studies done by (Hoar, Evans, & Link, 2012), that older, master athletes, tend to use more positive approach coping styles simply because they have less stress associated with their sport as they have successfully mastered the skill associated with their individual sport.

Conclusion

The present study is an attempt to explore the stress and coping style of both college athletes and nonathletes. From the result it is concluded that both college athletes and non-athletes are experiencing stress in their day to day life. On the other hand in coping style college athletes are differing from nonathletes. From the result it is concluded that stress management programmes should be introduced to teach the college students to manage their stress.

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