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Ashutosh Acharya
Lecturer, Government
College of Physical Education,
Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

Analysis of achievement goal orientation and coping strategies, among the university athletes

Ashutosh Acharya

Abstract

Objective of the study was to find out the relationship between goal orientations (task and ego) and psychological coping skills among University's athletes. Participants were 85 athletes, both male (n= 35) and female (n = 50) aged between 19 and 28 years old who represented one of the largest university of Eastern part of India i.e. Utkal University, Bhubaneswar. Results indicated that there is a moderate relationship between goal orientations and psychological coping skills, with ego orientation showing a stronger relationship than task orientation. Moreover, the results showed that the athletes have both high task (mean=3.97) and fairly high ego orientations (mean=3.71), and there was no significant differences between males and females in goal orientations ($p>.05$). The results found that ego orientation was significantly correlated with all the six coping skills ($p<.01$) but task orientation was significantly correlated with only five coping skills ($p<.01$) as freedom from worry was not significantly correlated with task orientation. The results on the relationship between gender and psychological coping skills found that females were more likely to use concentration and peaking under pressure, whereas male athletes used freedom from worry as their coping responses. The study also found that there is a significant relationship between the athlete's goal orientation and his/her psychological coping skills.

Keywords: Athletes, ego orientation, task orientation, coping, motivation, gender

1. Introduction

According to when an athlete is task-oriented or generally associated with desirable or adaptive achievement behavior, his or her primary goal will be to demonstrate mastery of the task in hand. That individual's perceptions of ability would be typically self-referenced; that is there would be an interest in learning and self-development, and their focus would on improving and working hard or putting forth maximum effort to the task with little or no concern for the outcome. Previous studies within sport contexts have found that task orientation is a positive predictor of pro-social behaviors.

With specific regard to competitiveness, found that when an athlete is ego oriented, he/she adopts a normative conception of ability and is interested in demonstrating the superiority of his or her ability to others, leading them to conclude that winning and beating others is the major focus of an ego-oriented athlete. In a study by Sit and the researchers have reported that high ego orientated youths are likely to be motivated by status only and as such, they reasoned that high ego-oriented youths employed another-referenced perception of ability, as they desire to outperform others in the comparison process so as to demonstrate their superior ability and attain social standing or mutual recognition.

Note that some researchers suggest that there is a relationship between achievement goals and responses to stress in sports. They also state that athletes, who are predominantly task-oriented and have internal criteria of determining success, may be better equipped to cope with stress, while athletes who are ego-oriented and have external criteria of success, such as outperforming other competitors, may be especially vulnerable to perceived stress and suffer possible performance decrements. Studies on the relationship between an athlete's achievement goals and responses to stress have revealed that task oriented athletes tend to cope better, have higher levels of self-efficacy and use more problem focused coping strategies; ego-oriented athletes tend to use emotion-focused coping.

Correspondence
Ashutosh Acharya
Lecturer, Government
College of Physical Education,
Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

The high task/low ego athletes employ more active coping and social emotional support strategies than high task/high ego and low task/low ego athletes. Therefore, an understanding of the athletes' achievement goal orientation and their mental coping skills may assist the coach to develop proper intervention programs to improve mental coping skills, which may ultimately lead to an enhancement of performance. However, the above research findings are lacking in India and such research will help to understand more about how coping strategies play their roles in motivating athletes especially with the university athletes. The study aims to investigate the relationship between achievement goal orientations and the psychological coping skills of University's athletes in one of the largest universities in eastern part of India.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Participants

A total of 85 university athletes (35 males, 50 females) who willing to participate, representing a wide variety of sports (football, athletics, volleyball, kabaddi, kho-kho) participated in this study. Goal orientations and psychological coping skills were assessed using questionnaires. The age range of the respondents was from 19 to 28 years ($M = 21.66$, $SD = 1.63$). These athletes were all from university teams and had competed in one or more competitions in the All India Inter-Varsity / Inter University (Zonal) Competitions.

2.2 Procedure

A self-report questionnaire was given to the University Sports Officer and he distributed them to the athletes who were selected to represent Utkal University in various games and sports. The researcher explained the purpose and information on the completion of the questionnaire to the university sports officer to ensure that the athletes completed the questionnaires as required. The sports officer then passed the questionnaires on to the participants to complete when they attended training sessions. The completed questionnaires were collected back after one week from the commencement of the university selection camp.

2.3 Instrumentation

The following instruments were used to collect the data required.

2.3.1 Demographic variables

The questionnaire also contained items that determined the age, gender and ethnicity of each of the respondents.

2.3.2 Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire (TEOSQ Duda & Nicholls, 1992)

The subscales were found to be internally consistent with alpha levels for task orientation .79 and .89 study and from .79 to .87 respectively.

2.3.3 Athletic Coping Skills Inventory – (ACSI-28; Smith, Schultz, Smoll, & Placek, 1995)

Each subscale consisted of four items that were averaged to provide a subscale range of 0 to 3. The subscales were found to be internally consistent with alpha levels ranging from .62 to .78 and a total (personal coping resources) scale alpha of .86 as reported in.

2.4 Analysis of Data

All the data were analyzed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) program software version 19.0. An independent T-test was used to compare the mean between male and female on the achievement goal orientations and mental coping skills score in athletes. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to analyze the relationship between the achievement goal orientations and the mental coping skills score in athletes.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive statistics

The mean and standard deviations of all the variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of sub variables of goal orientation and coping skills of athletes (n=85)

Variables	Mean	SD
Task Orientation	3.97	.60
Ego Orientation	3.71	.58
ACSI – 28		
Coping with adversity	2.08	.46
Peaking under pressure	1.94	.53
Goal setting	2.02	.56
Concentration	1.98	.48
Freedom from worry	1.12	.60
Confidence	2.03	.50
Coachability		
Total of personal coping resource	1.85	.27

In general, the participants were highly task oriented and were also perceived to have a fairly high ego orientation as evidenced by the high mean scores (see Table 2). For the ACSI – 28, the athlete's most frequently used coping skills is the coping with adversity skill ($M = 2.08$, $SD = .46$) and the least frequently used is the freedom from worry ($M = 1.12$, $SD = .60$).

3.2 Means differences between ACSI – 28 scales and gender

Table 2: Independent-sample t-test Results on ACSI-28 scales according to Gender

ACSI – 28 Scale	t	P
Peaking under pressure	-2.153	.034*
Concentration	-2.702	.008**
Freedom from worry	2.618	.011*
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$		

Table 2 showed that there were significant differences in the three subscales of ACSI – 28 between males and females, which were concentrated with $t(83) = -2.702$, $p = .008$, freedom from worry with $t(83) = 2.618$, $p = .011$, and peaking under pressure with $t(83) = -2.153$, $p = .034$. Except these three none of the variables of ACSI accounted for significant difference. In addition, the results showed that there were no significant differences between males and females on the task orientation ($p > .05$), and ego orientation ($p > .05$).

3.3 Quantitative relationship between task orientation and coping skills

Table 3: Coping strategies correlated with achievement goal orientation

ACSI – 28	Task orientation	Ego orientation
Coping with adversity	.34**	.46**
Peaking under pressure	.28**	.52**
Goal setting	.38**	.53**
Concentration	.23**	.36**
Freedom from worry	-.20	-.34**
Confidence	.42**	.47**
Total coping resource	.39**	.54**
** $p < .01$.		

As illustrated in Table 3, Pearson product-moment correlations revealed weak to moderate correlations among the achievement goal orientations and ACSI – 28 subscales. The five subscales of coping skills (coping with adversity, peaking under pressure, goal setting, concentration and confidence) and the total of personal coping resources were positively correlated and were significant with both task and ego orientations ($p < .01$). Freedom from worry was found to be negatively correlated and was significant with ego orientation only.

4. Discussion

The results of the study showed that athletes have comparatively higher task orientation profiles and there are no gender differences on achievement goal orientations. These findings, notwithstanding, the study also found that there are some gender differences in the coping skills among the athletes and that there are significant positive relationships between certain coping skills and achievement goal orientations. The results of this study showed that the university athletes in question had high task ($M = 3.97$) and fairly high ego orientations ($M = 3.71$).

Indian athletes' achievement goal orientations are both high, which means that the athletes were high task oriented ($M = 4.14$) and fairly highly ego oriented ($M = 3.49$). Attributed the higher task orientation scores to systematic training and access to the university facilities. Likewise, the athletes in this study could have also benefited from the training programs and accessibility to university sport facilities, which could have encouraged them to focus on developing their competencies in their respective sports field.

The present study also compared whether there was any gender difference in the athlete's achievement orientation. The results showed that there was no gender difference in the athletes' achievement goal orientation. This conclusion is different from previous studies which had found that there were gender differences in the achievement goal orientation. Therefore further research is needed to explain the inconsistencies in these results and clarify whether there are indeed gender differences in goal orientations among athletes. The results of the present study also showed that there were some gender differences on the coping skills among the athletes. Females scored higher than males on the subscales of "peaking under pressure" and "concentration". However, male athletes scored higher on "freedom from worry" than their female counterparts. These results lend some support to a study by which found that females reported greater use of coping behaviors compared to men.

Results of the present study on relationship between task orientation and coping skills showed that there were

significant low positive relationships between task orientation and the subscales of "confidence", "goal setting" and "coping with adversity". These findings suggest that high task oriented athletes indicated that they have confidence in their ability through consistently working hard during practices and competitions, and set and work towards specific performance goals for themselves, and they are able to cope with adversity by remaining positive against all adversities. These findings are in accord with past studies which have also shown that task oriented individuals are intrinsically motivated, focus on self-referenced criteria such as personal improvement and learning in order to determine their competence.

When ego orientation is correlated with coping skills, the results of the present study showed that there were moderate and positive relationships with the coping skills of "goal setting", "peaking under pressure" and "confidence". The present study found that there is some relationship between the achievement goals and coping skills of Indian athletes. However, these findings also suggest that further research in this area is likely to assist sport psychologists and coaches in developing a more thorough understanding of the achievement goal orientations of Indian athletes and those interventions can undoubtedly play a key role in helping them to cope better in competitive settings. The findings from the present study also suggest that it would be desirable for future research to consider larger sample sizes of athletes for better generalizability of research results.

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