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A comparative study of coping strategies among sportsperson of different gender, age and sports

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Abstract

The present study compared coping strategies among sports persons of different genders, ages, and sports. For data collection, a total of 700 sportspersons in the age group of 17–25 years were selected from both genders (350 males and 350 females). The subjects were delimited to individual sports like athletics and wrestling and team sports like kabaddi, kho-kho, basketball, football, and hockey and further delimited pre-university and college students from Karnataka state. Data was collected from consecutive eligible subjects by administering the questionnaire Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Inventory, Brief-COPE, prepared by Novo Psych Hegarty & Buchanan, 2021. The test consists of 28 statements related to the Sport Brief-Cope. To examine the hypothesis of the study, descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, ANOVA, and comparative statistics such as multivariate and univariate analysis of variance were conducted. Where required, figures and tables were used to finalise the collected data.

Keywords: Coping strategies, individual sports, team sports, Sports persons, etc.

1. Introduction

Coping is defined as the thoughts and behaviours mobilized to manage internal and external stressful situations ^[1]. It is a term used distinctively to refer to conscious or subconscious actions leading toward adaptive responses which aim to reduce or tolerate stressful situations. ^[2] Coping styles refer to conditioned stable traits which are developed in an individual during the process of facing various stressors and which determine the individual's behavioural response to stressful conditions. These are usually consistent over time and across similar situations. ^[3] Generally, coping can be categorised as reactive coping (showing a reaction to a stressor) and proactive coping (aiming to overcome future stressors). Proactive individuals perform well in stable environments because they are more routinized, rigid, and less reactive to stressors, while reactive individuals perform better in a more dynamic and varied environment ^[4].

There are a variety of factors, such as gender, age, occupation, cultural experience, and social status, which have an effect on competition anxiety ^[5, 6]. Athletes use their methods to tackle different symptoms of anxiety; such methods can be referred to as coping strategies. Using different coping techniques can channel the stress symptoms and facilitate better performance in competitive situations ^[7, 8, 9].

Research involving sports coping strategies shows that problem-focused strategies are leading to positive effects and problem-avoidance strategies leads to negative effects ^[10, 11]. Problem-focused coping techniques are focused on solving the problems, while avoidance coping avoids interfering with thoughts and actions. Studies have shown that cognitive avoidance strategies have succeeded in being more successful in table tennis matches ^[12] Krohne and Hindel (1988), also, avoidance coping was linked with less state anxiety when compared to using problem-solving coping methods ^[12]. (Krohne and Hindel, 1988). Similar studies indicated that in uncontrollable situations, avoidance techniques were better, while in situations where control was possible, problem-solving coping was more suitable ^[13]. A study conducted by Ntoumanis and Biddle ^[14] indicated that high levels of cognitive anxiety would apply more avoidance techniques while low cognitive competitive anxiety would use more problem-focused coping strategies. Further, gender would also play a role in the selection of

coping styles.

Competing in sports gives rise to an array of stressors such as pain, fear, anxiety, family and coach pressure, academic pressures and the demands of competitive sports [15,16,17]. The failure to cope with such stressful performance-inhibitory situations could lead to failure in many of the athletic situations [18]. Therefore, suitable coping strategies must be developed not only to achieve optimum performance but also to derive a satisfying experience. Based on all the studies conducted, researchers have acknowledged that coping strategies are crucial for improving performance since coping research has plenty of potential to contribute significantly to practical situations [18].

This study would contribute towards documenting the coping strategies of sportspersons of different games, genders, and age groups in an Indian setting. It would certainly go a long way in strategizing handling sports anxiety symptoms, leading to better performances.

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Selection of subjects

Seven hundred sportspersons were selected for the study, of which 350 were males and 350 females. They were in the age group of 17-25 years. Four hundred belonged to team sports, 200 practised indigenous games, and 100 each played individual and combat sports.

2.2 Instrumentation and procedure

The participants were given the Informed Consent form and appraised of the procedure to be followed in responding to the questionnaire. The participants were given the Brief COPEp [19], which is an abbreviated inventory of coping responses. It is composed of 28 items and consists of 14 subscales and two questions per subscale, namely (a) acceptance, (b) active coping, (c) behavioural disengagement (d) denial, (e) humour (f) planning, (g) positive reframing (h) religion (i) self-blame (j) self-distraction (k) substance abuse (l) using emotional support (m) using instrumental support and (n) venting. Response choices ranged from (1) I didn't do this at all to (4) I did this a lot. Results in each subscale are obtained by

adding the respective item, thus ranging from 4 to 8 in each subscale. The participants were asked to recall how they normally would respond to stressful situations arising out of their sports experience [20].

2.3 Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was done using SPSS 20 software. Descriptive statistics was used to depict the characteristics and basic data in the study. T-test and ANOVA were implemented to compute the significant differences between different groups of study. Where required, post hoc analysis was done. To assess the significant differences, the participants were categorized into gender (males and females), age (20 years and above and below 20 years) and type of sports (team – hockey, football and basketball; individual – athletics; indigenous – kabaddi and kho kho and combat sports – wrestling).

3. Results

Table 1: Categories of participants

Categories	Sub-categories	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	350	50
	Female	350	50
Sport types	Team sports	300	43
	Individual sports	100	14
	Indigenous sports	200	29
	Combat Sports	100	14
Age	20 years and above	404	58
	Below 20 years	296	42

Table 1 depicts the percentage of participants in different categories of study. For gender-based analysis, males and females represent equally, i.e. 50%. Team sports comprise hockey, basketball and football (43%), individual sports comprise athletic participants (14%), indigenous sports consist of kabaddi and kho kho (29%) and combat sports include wrestlers (14%). The age-based analysis consist of participants below 20 years (42%) and 20 years and above (58%).

Table 2: Coping subscale levels of all the participants

Coping subscales	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Acceptance	700	2.5550	.84714
Active Coping	700	2.5529	.87571
Behavioural Disengagement	700	2.0050	.76795
Denial	700	2.1693	.79581
Humour	700	2.0329	.85522
Planning	700	2.5757	.90024
Positive Reframing	700	2.4157	.90778
Religion	700	2.3414	.83845
Self Blame	700	2.1036	.79316
Self Distraction	700	2.1500	.73123
Substance Use	700	1.8079	.74254
Emotional Support	700	2.3779	.84178
Instrumental Support	700	2.5636	.92371
Venting	700	1.9371	.74861

Table 2 indicates the total level of coping strategies adopted by all the participants. The athletes use mostly problem-focused coping strategies which display high values such as instrumental support (2.56), acceptance and active coping (2.55), planning (2.57), emotional support (2.37) and positive reframing (2.41). On the opposite end, they use emotional-

based coping such as venting (1.93), self-blame (2.10), denial (2.16) and avoidance coping such as behavioural disengagement (2.00) and self-distraction (2.15) to a lesser extent.

3.1 Gender based analysis

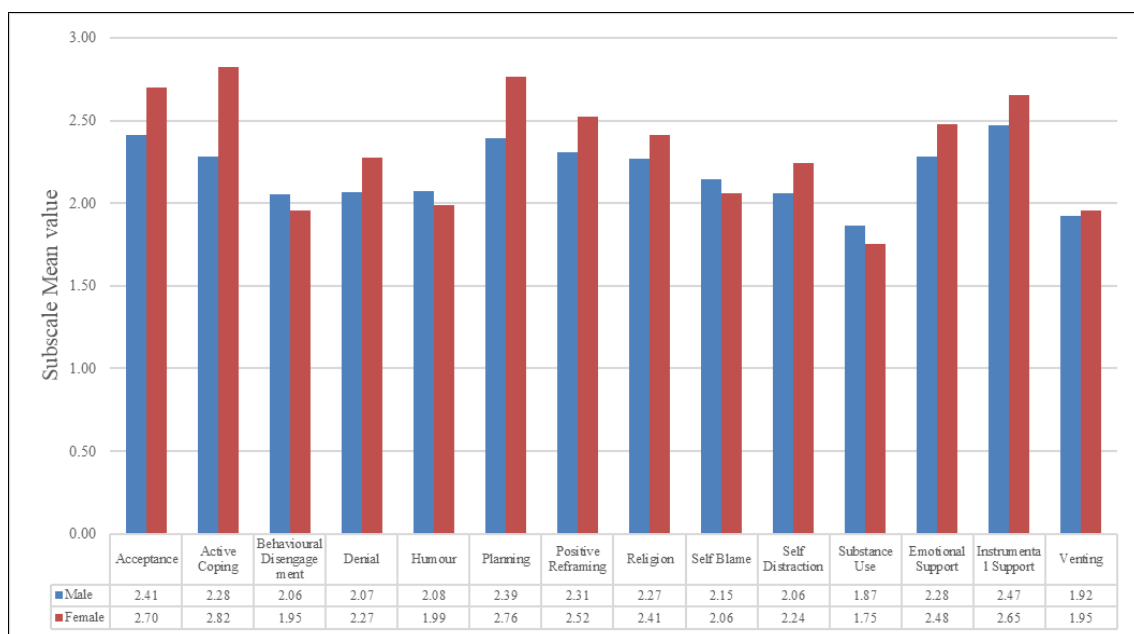
Table 3: Coping subscale statistics of the participants according to gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	P value (Sig)
Acceptance	Male	350	2.41	0.86712	0.04635	P<0.01
	Female	350	2.7	0.80204	0.04287	(HS)
Active Coping	Male	350	2.2814	0.7913	0.0423	P<0.01
	Female	350	2.8243	0.87294	0.04666	(HS)
Behavioural Disengagement	Male	350	2.0557	0.73329	0.0392	P=0.081>0.05
	Female	350	1.9543	0.79894	0.04271	(NS)
Denial	Male	350	2.0657	0.79213	0.04234	P<0.01
	Female	350	2.2729	0.78706	0.04207	(HS)
Humour	Male	350	2.0757	0.83742	0.04476	P=0.185>0.05
	Female	350	1.99	0.87174	0.0466	(NS)
Planning	Male	350	2.39	0.85565	0.04574	P<0.01
	Female	350	2.7614	0.90657	0.04846	(HS)
Positive Reframing	Male	350	2.31	0.81377	0.0435	P<0.01
	Female	350	2.5214	0.98279	0.05253	(HS)
Religion	Male	350	2.2714	0.84757	0.0453	P<0.01
	Female	350	2.4114	0.82451	0.04407	(HS)
Self Blame	Male	350	2.1471	0.79697	0.0426	P=0.146>0.05
	Female	350	2.06	0.78806	0.04212	(NS)
Self Distraction	Male	350	2.06	0.72163	0.03857	P<0.01
	Female	350	2.24	0.7307	0.03906	(HS)
Substance Use	Male	350	1.8657	0.6838	0.03655	P<0.05
	Female	350	1.75	0.79373	0.04243	(S)
Emotional Support	Male	350	2.2786	0.83886	0.04484	P<0.01
	Female	350	2.4771	0.83412	0.04459	(HS)
Instrumental Support	Male	350	2.4729	0.89649	0.04792	P<0.01
	Female	350	2.6543	0.94273	0.05039	(HS)
Venting	Male	350	1.9214	0.68673	0.03671	P=0.579>0.05
	Female	350	1.9529	0.80644	0.04311	(NS)

HS: Highly significant, NS: Not Significant, S: Significant

Table 3 depicts the coping strategy adopted by athletes based on gender (Figure 1). It is observed that female athletes differed significantly better in both problem-focused and

emotion/avoidance-oriented coping as compared to male athletes.

**Fig 1:** Coping subscale values of male and female athletes

From the Independent Sample t-test one can observe that there exists a significant difference in the coping scales such as Acceptance, Active Coping, Denial, Planning, Positive Reframing, Religion, Self-Distraction, Substance Use, Emotional Support and Instrumental Support between male and female sports persons at 5% level of significance as p values are less than 0.05. Further, it can be observed that on average for the coping scales Acceptance, Active Coping,

Denial, Planning, Positive Reframing, Religion, Self-Distraction, Emotional Support, and Instrumental Support female sportspersons are at high scale level as compared to a male athlete but as far as Substance use is concerned, male athletes are at a high level of usage as compared to female athletes.

There is no significant difference in the coping scales such as Humour, Behavioural Disengagement, Self-Blame, and

venting between male and female athletes at a 5% level of significance as p values are greater than 0.05.

3.2 Age based analysis

From the Independent Sample t-test one can observe that there exists a significant difference in the coping scales such as Behavioural Disengagement, Denial, Humour, Planning, Self-Blame, Substance use and venting between below 20 years and above 20 years of age athletes at 1% level of

significance as p values are less than 0.01. Further, it can be observed that on average for the Behavioural Disengagement, Denial, Humour, Self-Blame and Venting Above 20 years athletes are at a high scale level as compared to those below 20 years athlete but as far as Planning and substance use are concerned below 20 years sports persons are at high scale level as compared to above 20 years sportspersons (Table 4 and Figure 2).

Table 4: Coping subscale statistics of the participants according to age

Variables	Age Class	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	P value (Sig)
Acceptance	Below 20 Years	404	2.5062	0.86313	0.04294	P=0.075>0.05
	Above 20 years	296	2.6216	0.82158	0.04775	(NS)
Active Coping	Below 20 Years	404	2.5941	0.89238	0.0444	P=0.146>0.05
	Above 20 years	296	2.4966	0.85072	0.04945	(NS)
Behavioural Disengagement	Below 20 Years	404	1.9319	0.78348	0.03898	P<0.01
	Above 20 years	296	2.1047	0.73589	0.04277	(HS)
Denial	Below 20 Years	404	2.0928	0.78883	0.03925	P<0.01
	Above 20 years	296	2.2736	0.79476	0.04619	(HS)
Humour	Below 20 Years	404	1.8998	0.84711	0.04215	P<0.01
	Above 20 years	296	2.2145	0.83388	0.04847	(HS)
Planning	Below 20 Years	404	2.6559	0.91605	0.04558	P<0.01
	Above 20 years	296	2.4662	0.86781	0.05044	(HS)
Positive Reframing	Below 20 Years	404	2.4517	0.90738	0.04514	P=0.220>0.05
	Above 20 years	296	2.3666	0.90756	0.05275	(NS)
Religion	Below 20 Years	404	2.3626	0.8601	0.04279	P=0.435>0.05
	Above 20 years	296	2.3125	0.80852	0.04699	(NS)
Self Blame	Below 20 Years	404	2.0198	0.78895	0.03925	P<0.01
	Above 20 years	296	2.2179	0.78588	0.04568	(HS)
Self Distraction	Below 20 Years	404	2.1337	0.73343	0.03649	P=0.430>0.05
	Above 20 years	296	2.1723	0.72886	0.04236	(NS)
Substance Use	Below 20 Years	404	1.8614	0.78957	0.03928	P=0.022<0.05
	Above 20 years	296	1.7348	0.66748	0.0388	(S)
Emotional Support	Below 20 Years	404	2.3874	0.82775	0.04118	P=0.727>0.05
	Above 20 years	296	2.3649	0.8618	0.05009	(NS)
Instrumental Support	Below 20 Years	404	2.5916	0.94595	0.04706	P=0.349>0.05
	Above 20 years	296	2.5253	0.89264	0.05188	(NS)
Venting	Below 20 Years	404	1.8837	0.75222	0.03742	P<0.01
	Above 20 years	296	2.0101	0.73869	0.04294	(HS)

HS: Highly significant, NS: Not Significant, S: Significant

There is no significant difference in the coping scales such as Acceptance, Active Coping, Positive Reframing, Religion, Self-Distraction, Emotional Support and Instrumental Support

between below 20 years and above 20 years of age athletes at a 5% level of significance as p values are greater than 0.01.

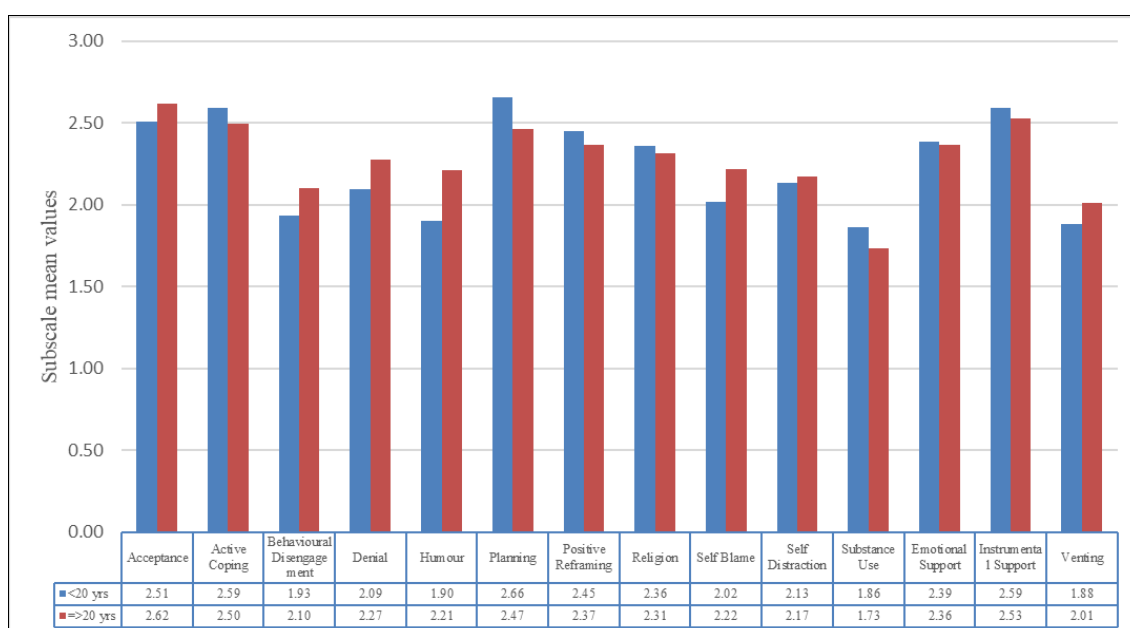


Fig 2: Coping subscales according to age

3.3 Type of sports-based analysis

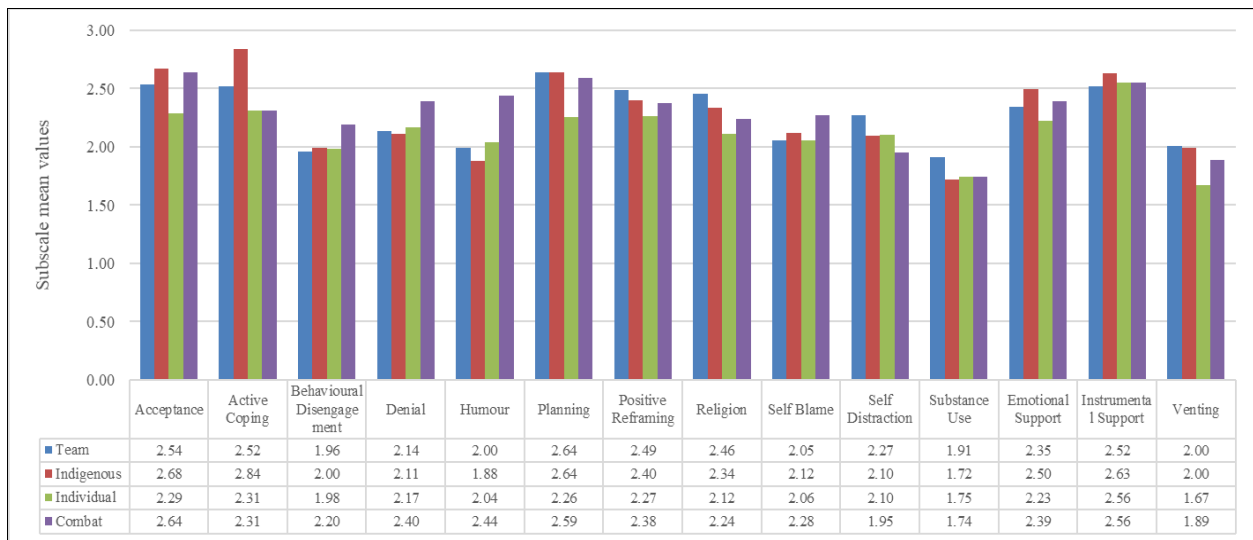
Table 5: Coping subscale statistics of the participants according to type of sport

Variable	Sport	N	Mean	SD	Significance
Acceptance	Team Sport	300	2.5367	0.87629	.001**
	Indigenous Sport	200	2.675	0.85618	
	Individual Sport	100	2.285	0.76954	
	Combat Sport	100	2.64	0.75572	
Active Coping	Team Sport	300	2.5217	0.85604	.000**
	Indigenous Sport	200	2.8425	0.85885	
	Individual Sport	100	2.31	0.91778	
	Combat Sport	100	2.31	0.76469	
Behavioural Disengagement	Team Sport	300	1.9567	0.7105	0.059
	Indigenous Sport	200	1.995	0.80823	
	Individual Sport	100	1.98	0.81004	
	Combat Sport	100	2.195	0.79103	
Denial	Team Sport	300	2.135	0.77972	.021*
	Indigenous Sport	200	2.11	0.81469	
	Individual Sport	100	2.165	0.79473	
	Combat Sport	100	2.395	0.77946	
Humour	Team Sport	300	1.995	0.85141	.000**
	Indigenous Sport	200	1.8825	0.86672	
	Individual Sport	100	2.04	0.80616	
	Combat Sport	100	2.44	0.7729	
Planning	Team Sport	300	2.6367	0.90224	.002**
	Indigenous Sport	200	2.6375	0.9201	
	Individual Sport	100	2.255	0.86309	
	Combat Sport	100	2.59	0.83297	
Positive Reframing ⁺	Team Sport	300	2.4883	0.85428	0.162
	Indigenous Sport	200	2.4025	1.01706	
	Individual Sport	100	2.265	0.9058	
	Combat Sport	100	2.375	0.82074	
Religion ⁺	Team Sport	300	2.455	0.86485	.001**
	Indigenous Sport	200	2.335	0.92578	
	Individual Sport	100	2.115	0.69215	
	Combat Sport	100	2.24	0.63357	
Self Blame ⁺	Team Sport	300	2.0533	0.74768	0.086
	Indigenous Sport	200	2.1175	0.83271	
	Individual Sport	100	2.055	0.85249	
	Combat Sport	100	2.275	0.76994	
Self Distraction	Team Sport	300	2.27	0.74428	.001**
	Indigenous Sport	200	2.095	0.68434	
	Individual Sport	100	2.1	0.77525	
	Combat Sport	100	1.95	0.6835	
Substance Use	Team Sport	300	1.91	0.7575	.018*
	Indigenous Sport	200	1.72	0.73437	
	Individual Sport	100	1.745	0.76043	
	Combat Sport	100	1.74	0.66469	
Emotional Support	Team Sport	300	2.3467	0.87026	0.055
	Indigenous Sport	200	2.495	0.84471	
	Individual Sport	100	2.225	0.79256	
	Combat Sport	100	2.39	0.77388	
Instrumental Support ⁺	Team Sport	300	2.5233	0.87388	0.66
	Indigenous Sport	200	2.6325	0.9905	
	Individual Sport	100	2.555	1.05144	
	Combat Sport	100	2.555	0.79103	
Venting	Team Sport	300	2.0033	0.75624	.001**
	Indigenous Sport	200	1.995	0.77652	
	Individual Sport	100	1.67	0.66371	
	Combat Sport	100	1.89	0.69479	

* Significant at 5% level of significance ** Significant at 1% level of significance ⁺Weich ANOVA is applied

Table 5 exhibits the coping strategies used by athletes of different categories of sport. It can be observed that team sport athletes differ significantly from other sports athletes in most of the subscales, followed by combat sports and

indigenous sports. Individual athletes score the least in most of the subscales as compared to athletes of other sports categories.



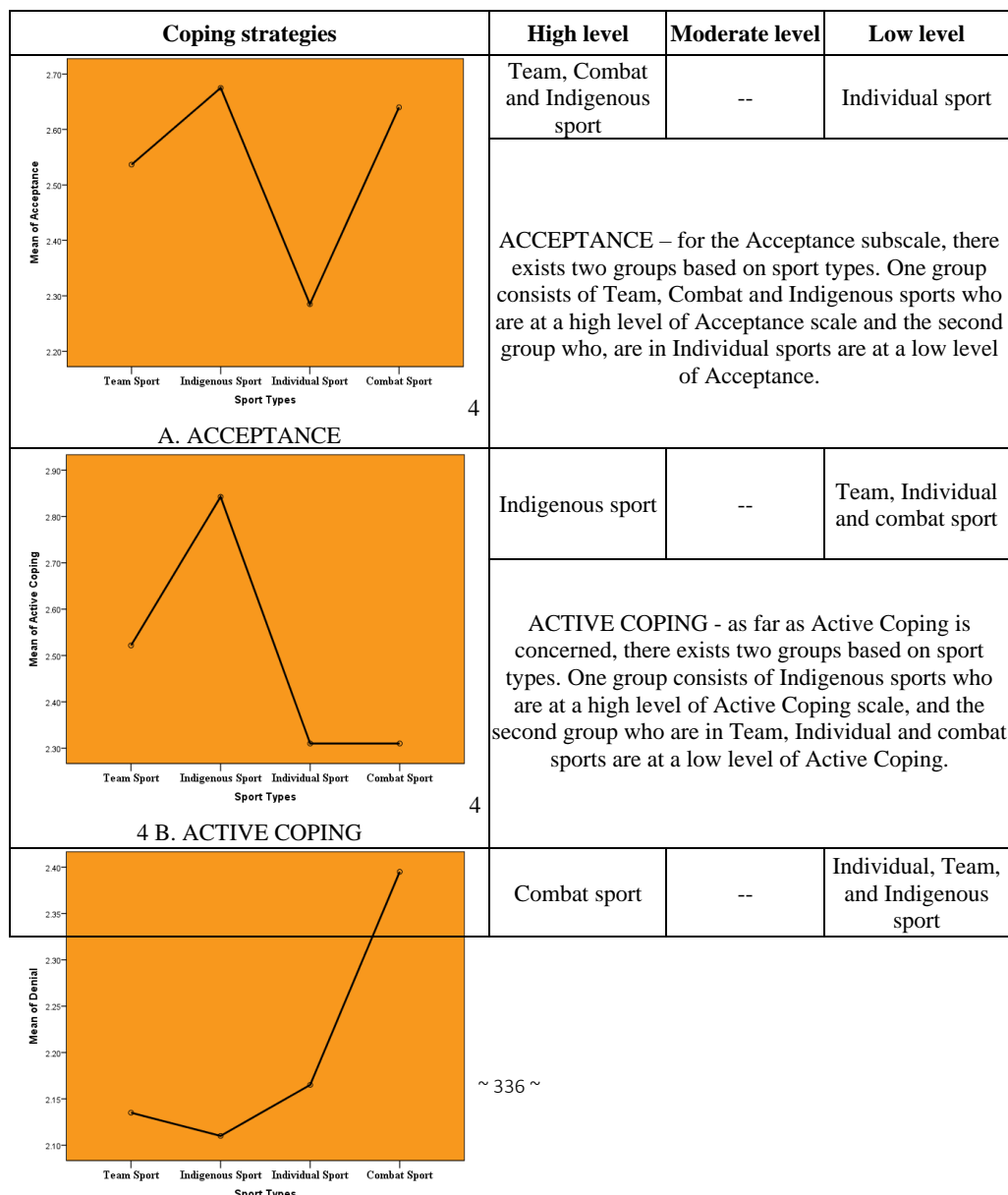
From Levene's Test for homogeneity of variance, we can observe that groups are homogeneous for Acceptance, Active Coping, Behavioural engagement Denial, Humour, planning, Self-Distraction, Substance use, Emotional Support, and Venting as p-value is greater than 0.05 and hence ANOVA is applied but for Self-Blame, Positive Reframing, Religion, and Instrumental Support p values are less than 0.05 and hence groups are not homogeneous so Weich ANOVA is applied.

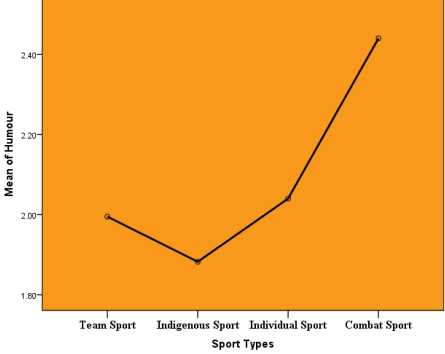
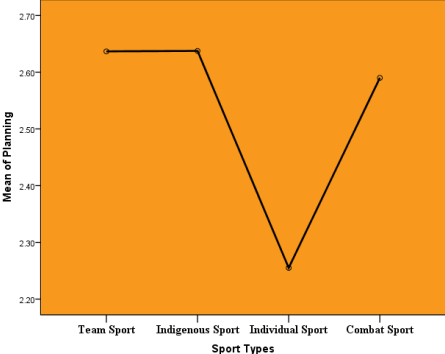
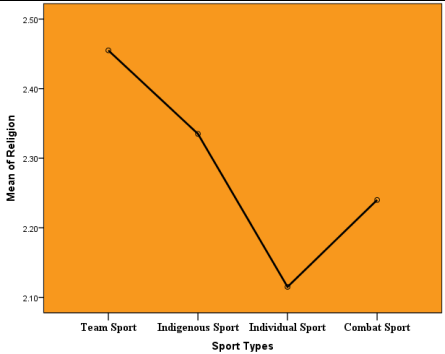

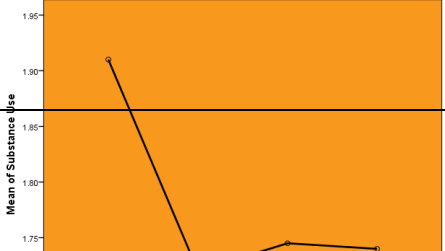
From ANOVA, it is evident that there exists a significant difference in the coping scales, such as Acceptance, Active Coping, Denial, Humour, Planning, Religion, Self-

Distraction, Substance Use and Venting, between various sport types at a 5% level of significance as p values are less than 0.05. There is no significant difference in the coping scales such as Behavioural Disengagement, Emotional Support, Positive Reframing, Self-blame, and Instrumental Support between various sport types at a 5% level of significance as p vales are greater than 0.05.

Post Hoc Analysis

From the Post Hoc analysis means plot one can make the following analysis.



<p>C. DENIAL</p>	<p>DENIAL - From Post Hoc Analysis Means Plot, one can observe that as far as Denial is concerned, there exists two groups based on sport types. One group consists of Combat sports who are at high level of Denial scale and the second group who are in Individual, Team, and Indigenous sport are at low level of Denial.</p>		
 <p>Mean of Humour</p> <p>Sport Types</p>	<p>Combat sport</p>	<p>--</p>	<p>Individual, Team, Indigenous sport</p>
<p>D. HUMOUR</p>  <p>Mean of Planning</p> <p>Sport Types</p>	<p>Team, Indigenous and Combat sport</p>	<p>--</p>	<p>Individual sport</p>
<p>E. PLANNING</p>  <p>Mean of Religion</p> <p>Sport Types</p>	<p>Team sport</p>	<p>--</p>	<p>Individual sport, Indigenous and Combat sport</p>
<p>F. RELIGION</p>  <p>Mean of Self Distracton</p> <p>Sport Types</p>	<p>Team sport</p>	<p>Indigenous and Individual sport</p>	<p>Combat sport</p>
<p>G. SELF-DISTRACTION</p>  <p>Mean of Substance Use</p> <p>Sport Types</p>	<p>Team sport</p>	<p>--</p>	<p>Individual, Indigenous and Combat sport</p>

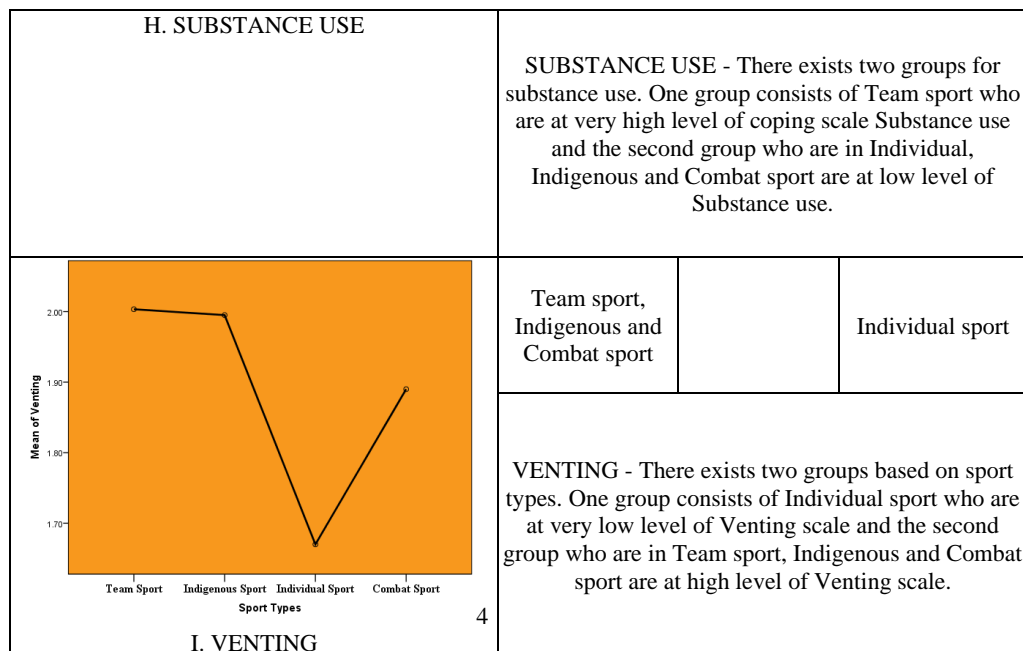


Fig 4 A-I: Post-Hoc Mean plots for coping subscales for type of sports

4. Discussion

The study was conducted to find the coping strategies adopted by various categories of sports such as gender based, age based, and sport type based. It is interesting to find the coping methods employed by different categories.

Gender-wise

Studies indicate that both male and female athletes use problem focussed and emotion based coping techniques, there are significant differences in the coping strategies adopted by them. Males use more of problem-solving coping techniques, while females tend towards coping through emotional based coping techniques [21, 22].

This study indicates that females show significantly more active coping strategies adopting Acceptance, Active Coping, Denial, Planning, Positive reframing, Religion, Self-distraction, emotional support and instrumental support. Males showed significantly more coping level in substance use.

It is interesting to note that females score significantly higher on all the subscales of coping which opens the door for discussion on the psychological maturity of women in facing the odds. Though many studies do indicate that women use more of emotion oriented coping strategies, this study also indicates that they are adept in adopting problem focussed coping strategies as well.

Age-wise

Though not many studies have been reported on age based coping interventions, Nicholls and Pollman conducted a systematic review of studies done on age related stress coping techniques and found evidence that suggested there were coping differences between young and older sportspersons with the older athletes better being able to cope with sports related pressures [23]. Studies have shown that with age the coping strategies are more efficient [24].

According to the findings of this study, athletes above 20 years showed significantly more coping by using Behavioural disengagement, Denial, Humour, self-blame, and venting, while athletes below 20 years showing significantly more coping using planning strategy. More studies would have to confirm the psychological disposition of young athletes, and

strategies have to be planned accordingly.

Sport type based

Pluhar (2019) is of the view that team athletes had positive experiences related to their sport with regards to coaching, team support which resulted in more satisfactory sport experiences [25]. Individual athletes are left to fend for themselves in the face of sports pressures, but they develop independence and the ability to face adversities. Team athletes may face the additional pressure of team expectations and coaching dynamics, but individual athletes may have to go through internal problems which might lead to self-derision and depression [25].

In this study, athletes of team sports exhibited the significantly higher level of coping employing the most subscales of coping strategies i.e. Religion, self-distraction, substance use / Acceptance, planning and venting. Combat sport athletes adopted significantly higher levels of coping namely, Denial, Humour / Active coping, Planning and Venting. Indigenous sport athletes significantly differed in active coping / acceptance, planning and venting. Not many studies have been conducted on sports specific coping strategies this study paves the way for further studies. Individual athletes do suffer from coping with their respective sport pressures, as the study reports that they are not significantly better in coping as compared to other sports categories in all the coping subscales.

This study though involves a reasonable number of participants is not without its limitations. Individual and combat categories could have involved more sports thus increasing the sampling size. The scope of this study could have been extended to differences within each category such as between different sport in team sport or between each combat sport. Nonetheless, this study opens up important points for discussion, and improvements as stated earlier could be carried on in future research.

5. Conclusion

Psychology is a dynamic field and is the least understood field of study where conclusions are not black and white. Wide variety of factors affect the psychological construction of an individual and is a product of genetics, environment, society

and so on. This study does contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the differences in coping strategies adopted by different genders, ages and sports. Further studies are suggested to include more specific sports stressors and specific coping strategies within a specific sport. India comprising of multi-cultural, language, religious beliefs, makes it more challenging and provides more scope for expanding the studies to different regions and region-based sports.

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