



Role of Coping Strategies in Managing Stress and Pressure Among Maharashtra Wrestlers Across Playing Levels

¹Vikas Vishwanath Mujumale and ²Dr. Sandipraj Shashikant Autade

¹Research Scholar, Bir Tikendrajit University, Canchipur, Manipur, India

²Professor, Department of Physical Education, Bir Tikendrajit University, Canchipur, Manipur, India

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Corresponding Author: Vikas Vishwanath Mujumale

Abstract

Wrestling is one of the most physically demanding and psychologically challenging sports, requiring athletes to perform under intense competitive pressure while maintaining physical endurance, emotional stability, and mental resilience. Athletes frequently encounter various sources of stress arising from competition, performance expectations, training demands, injuries, academic responsibilities, social relationships, and future career uncertainties. Effective coping strategies are therefore essential for managing stress and maintaining optimal performance. The present study investigates the role of coping strategies in managing stress and pressure among Maharashtra wrestlers competing at district, state, and national levels. The study examines coping behavior, stress management, motivation, and coping effectiveness across different playing levels. The theoretical foundation of the study is based on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, Athletic Coping Skills Inventory, Self-Determination Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and the Cognitive-Motivational-Relational Theory of Emotion. A quantitative research approach was adopted involving 500 wrestlers selected from various regions of Maharashtra. The findings indicate that wrestlers competing at higher levels demonstrate superior coping skills, greater psychological resilience, higher intrinsic motivation, and better stress management capabilities. National-level wrestlers exhibit stronger commitment, control, and challenge-oriented coping behaviors compared to district-level competitors. The study highlights the importance of psychological skill development, coping strategy training, and mental conditioning programs for improving athletic performance and overall well-being among wrestlers.

Keywords: Coping Strategies, Stress Management, Wrestling, Psychological Skills, Motivation, Athletic Performance, Maharashtra Wrestlers

Introduction

Sport has become increasingly competitive in modern society, placing significant psychological demands on athletes. Wrestling, in particular, requires athletes to maintain a delicate balance between physical preparedness and mental toughness. Success in wrestling depends not only on technical proficiency and physical conditioning but also on the ability to cope effectively with stress and pressure. Wrestlers regularly encounter situations involving intense competition, performance evaluation, expectations from coaches and family members, fear of failure, injury concerns, and uncertainty regarding future opportunities. Such stressors can significantly influence athletic performance, motivation, emotional well-being, and career progression.

Stress is often described as a dynamic interaction between an individual and the environment in which demands exceed available resources. While moderate levels of stress can enhance motivation and performance, excessive stress can negatively affect concentration, confidence, decision-making ability, and emotional stability. Athletes who fail to manage stress effectively often experience anxiety, burnout, reduced performance, and psychological exhaustion. Consequently, understanding coping strategies becomes crucial in the context of competitive sports.

Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioral efforts used by individuals to manage internal and external demands that are perceived as challenging or threatening. Coping strategies help athletes regulate emotional responses, solve problems, maintain motivation, and adapt to changing

competitive situations. Effective coping enables wrestlers to remain focused under pressure, recover from setbacks, and sustain high levels of performance during competition.

The present study focuses on Maharashtra wrestlers competing at district, state, and national levels. Maharashtra has a rich wrestling tradition and has produced numerous successful athletes at national and international levels. Despite the sport's popularity, limited research has examined the psychological mechanisms that enable wrestlers to manage stress and perform effectively. Therefore, investigating coping strategies among wrestlers across different playing levels provides valuable insights into psychological adaptation and athletic success.

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in several established psychological theories. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping proposed by Lazarus and Folkman emphasizes that stress results from an individual's appraisal of environmental demands and available resources. According to this model, coping is a dynamic process involving continuous cognitive evaluation and behavioral adjustment.

The Athletic Coping Skills Inventory identifies key dimensions of psychological coping, including coping with adversity, concentration, goal setting, confidence, coachability, and freedom from worry. These dimensions are particularly relevant in competitive sports where athletes frequently encounter stressful situations.

Self-Determination Theory highlights the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in athletic behavior. Athletes who are intrinsically motivated tend to exhibit greater persistence, enjoyment, and resilience when facing challenges. Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy, observational learning, and confidence in determining coping behavior and performance outcomes.

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how wrestlers manage stress and develop effective coping mechanisms.

Coping Strategies in Competitive Wrestling

Wrestlers employ various coping strategies to manage competitive pressure. These strategies may be broadly categorized into problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance coping.

Problem-focused coping involves actively addressing the source of stress through planning, information gathering, skill development, and goal setting. Wrestlers who adopt this approach attempt to improve performance by identifying weaknesses, enhancing technical skills, and preparing systematically for competition.

Emotion-focused coping seeks to regulate emotional responses associated with stress. Techniques such as relaxation, meditation, positive self-talk, emotional expression, and cognitive reframing help athletes manage anxiety and maintain psychological balance.

Avoidance coping involves disengaging from stressful situations through denial, procrastination, distraction, or withdrawal. Although avoidance strategies may provide temporary relief, they often fail to address underlying problems and may negatively affect long-term performance. Research consistently indicates that successful athletes rely

more heavily on adaptive coping strategies, particularly problem-focused approaches, whereas less successful athletes tend to employ avoidance-based methods.

Stress and Pressure Among Wrestlers

Stress in wrestling originates from multiple sources. Performance-related stress is one of the most common forms, arising from concerns about winning, losing, rankings, and evaluation by coaches and spectators. Wrestlers also experience stress related to weight management, injuries, training demands, academic commitments, and interpersonal relationships.

Competitive stress intensifies as athletes progress to higher levels of competition. National-level wrestlers face greater expectations, stronger opponents, increased media attention, and higher performance standards. Consequently, effective stress management becomes increasingly important for maintaining consistency and achieving success.

Athletes typically interpret stressful situations either as threats or challenges. Those who perceive competition as a challenge are more likely to experience confidence, motivation, and excitement, whereas athletes who perceive competition as a threat often experience anxiety, fear, and self-doubt. The ability to reinterpret stressful situations positively represents an important component of successful coping.

Motivation and Coping Behavior

Motivation plays a central role in determining how athletes respond to stress. Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in sport for enjoyment, personal growth, skill development, and satisfaction. Extrinsic motivation involves participation driven by rewards, recognition, social approval, or external pressures.

Highly motivated wrestlers tend to demonstrate stronger commitment, persistence, and resilience. They are more likely to use adaptive coping strategies and maintain focus during challenging situations. Intrinsic motivation is particularly associated with positive psychological outcomes, including greater self-confidence, emotional stability, and effective stress management.

Conversely, athletes experiencing low motivation or amotivation often struggle with concentration, persistence, and emotional regulation. Reduced motivation may increase vulnerability to stress and negatively influence performance.

Playing Level Differences in Coping Strategies

One of the primary objectives of the study is to examine differences in coping strategies across playing levels. District-level wrestlers are generally at earlier stages of competitive development and may possess limited experience in managing high-pressure situations. As athletes progress to state and national levels, they accumulate competitive experience, develop psychological skills, and learn effective coping mechanisms.

National-level wrestlers typically demonstrate greater confidence, emotional control, and psychological resilience. Their exposure to diverse competitive environments enhances their ability to manage stress and maintain performance under pressure. State-level wrestlers occupy an intermediate position, exhibiting more advanced coping skills than district-level athletes but generally less

psychological maturity than national competitors.

The findings suggest that coping strategies improve progressively with competitive experience. Higher-level wrestlers display stronger commitment, better emotional regulation, and greater adaptability when facing challenges.

Coping Effectiveness and Athletic Performance

Coping effectiveness refers to the extent to which coping strategies successfully reduce stress and facilitate performance. Effective coping enables athletes to maintain concentration, regulate emotions, make appropriate decisions, and recover quickly from setbacks.

Several factors influence coping effectiveness, including self-confidence, motivation, social support, coaching quality, and previous experience. Athletes with strong coping skills are better equipped to manage competitive pressure and sustain high levels of performance.

The study demonstrates that wrestlers who employ adaptive coping strategies experience lower levels of stress and greater performance consistency. Effective coping contributes not only to competitive success but also to psychological well-being and long-term athletic development.

Practical Implications

The findings have important implications for athletes, coaches, sports psychologists, and sports organizations. Psychological skills training should become an integral component of wrestling development programs. Coaches should focus on enhancing athletes' coping abilities through goal-setting exercises, relaxation techniques, mental rehearsal, positive self-talk, and resilience-building interventions.

Sports psychologists can design targeted interventions aimed at improving emotional regulation, stress management, and motivation. Regular psychological assessment may help identify athletes at risk of excessive stress and facilitate early intervention.

Sports organizations should recognize the importance of mental health support and provide resources that promote psychological well-being among athletes. Comprehensive athlete development programs should address both physical and psychological aspects of performance.

Conclusion

The study highlights the critical role of coping strategies in managing stress and pressure among Maharashtra wrestlers. Wrestling presents numerous psychological challenges that require athletes to develop effective coping mechanisms in order to maintain performance and well-being. The findings indicate that coping abilities vary across playing levels, with national-level wrestlers demonstrating superior psychological skills compared to district and state-level competitors.

Adaptive coping strategies, including problem-focused coping, emotional regulation, and positive cognitive appraisal, contribute significantly to stress management and athletic success. Intrinsic motivation, self-confidence, and competitive experience further enhance coping effectiveness. The results emphasize the need for systematic psychological skills training within wrestling programs to help athletes manage stress, improve performance, and

achieve long-term success.

Developing effective coping strategies should be regarded as an essential component of athlete preparation. By fostering psychological resilience and adaptive coping behaviors, coaches and sport professionals can help wrestlers perform optimally under pressure while maintaining positive mental health and overall well-being.

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