

Fear Of Failure In Athletes: A Comparative Analysis Of Performance Fear Appraisal Inventory Subscales Between Sportsmen And Sportswomen

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ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this study was to assess if there is any difference in the performance fear appraisal inventory subscales between male and female athletes. In addition, we also evaluated if the overall fear of failure scores were higher in male or female athletes. It was a descriptive observational study. The sample consisted of two hundred subjects consisting of college and university level athletes, involved in team sports. Performance fear appraisal inventory was used to assess the fear of failure among the athletes. T-test was used to assess the gender differences in fear of failure. P value < 0.05 was considered significant. Results showed that sportsmen had higher overall fear of failure as compared to sportswomen. However, sportswomen had more fear of having an uncertain future as compared to sportsmen. Male athletes scored higher on the other four subscales of performance fear appraisal inventory.

Keywords: Fear of failure, Gender, Performance fear appraisal inventory.

INTRODUCTION:

Fear of failure is a major problem faced by the athletes in competitive sports. It is also experienced even by the elite athletes competing in major global sporting events. It is a negative emotion experienced by the athletes in an achievement-oriented setting in sports. It not only reduces the performance of an individual but can also lead to frustration, feeling of shame and low self-esteem. A large number of studies have suggested that fear of failure can have a negative impact on a person and deter him/her from achieving optimal efficiency at a particular task (Chong & Chong, 2023; Hu et al., 2023).

Fear of failure is the dispositional tendency to orient toward and to seek to avoid failure in achievement settings because one feels shame on failure. It is critical to understand that fear of failure does not mean that 'failure' is feared in itself rather it's the 'remorse' that accompanies the failure which is dreaded (Sivaramakrishnan et al., 2022).

The performance fear appraisal inventory (PFAI) was developed by Conroy et al., (2003). The authors described five types of repercussions of failure which are hence tied to threat appraisal and due to this appraisal, such repercussions are then feared.

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In sports there is a need for continuously evaluating the situations and responding accordingly. While setting higher standards in sports definitely lead to greater striving and improvement in performance but the downside is that such high standards and perfectionism may lead to loss of self-worth and higher fear of failure (Clements, 2008). The role of sports psychologist is of utmost importance in this respect since they can channel such perfectionism in a positive way for improvement of athletic performance (Pleva & Wade, 2007).

Sports psychology is a relatively new field in developing countries. There is a lack of research regarding sports psychology in such countries hence little is known about the mental impediments to better performance of the athletes. This study aims at evaluating the differences of fear of failure in male and female athletes. It also aims to assess if there are any differences in the five subtypes of fear of failure according to Performance Fear Appraisal Inventory subscales with respect to gender. This will not only help us better understand fear of failure in sports but also provide information about whether fear of failure is manifested differently in female athletes in a patriarchal society as is observed in most of the developing countries.

METHODOLOGY:

It was a descriptive observational study consisting of athletes from public and private sector colleges and universities. The study was conducted after approval 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. 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.

Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (PFAI) was used to assess the fear of failure. PFAI was developed by Conroy et al., (2003). The 25 items scales measures fear of failure in participants. Test 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. Gender differences of overall fear of failure and PFAI subscales was analyzed. The data was collected and analyzed using SPSS version 20. The t-test was used in order to assess the gender differences of fear of failure and its subscales. 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 ± 0.82 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 reliability of PFAI was .96. Hence it fell under good and acceptable criteria. Furthermore, the mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of PFAI and its subscales were evaluated (Table 2). 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. Sportswomen had higher levels of 'Fear of having an uncertain future' as compared to sportsmen. However, sportsmen scored higher on the other four subscales of PFAI as compared to their female counterparts (Table 3)

Table 1 Frequency and percentages of demographic variable (N=200)

Variables	F	%
Gender		
Male	100	50
Female	100	50
Education		
Intermediate	45	22.50
Graduation	99	49.50
- Master	53	26.50
M.Phil	3	1.50
Games		
Cricket	121	61
Hockey	120	60
Football	112	56
Volleyball	107	54

Table 2 Descriptive statistics and alpha reliability coefficients and univariate normality of variables (N=200)

Variables	Items	A	M	SD	Skew	Kur	Range	
							Potential	Actual
PFAI	25	.96	70.01	20.58	-.16	-.67	25-125	26-113
FSE	7	.89	19.26	6.42	-.29	-.72	7-35	7-33
FDSE	4	.72	11.43	3.19	-.26	-.47	4-20	4-18
FUF	4	.77	11.45	3.45	-.02	-.26	4-20	4-20
FIOLI	5	.86	13.88	4.63	-.18	-.79	5-25	5-23
FUIO	5	.81	13.97	4.52	.04	-.54	5-25	5-25

Note: 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, FIOI= Fear of Important Others Losing Interest, FUIO= Fear of Upsetting Important Others.

Table 3 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	
FSE	20.60	6.30	17.93	6.27	3.00	.003	.91	4.42	.43
FDSE	12.05	3.16	10.82	3.12	2.77	.006	.35	2.10	.39
FUF	10.85	3.22	12.06	3.57	2.51	.013	.26	2.16	.36
FIOLI	15.04	4.52	12.72	4.47	3.64	.000	1.06	3.57	.52
FUIO	15.16	4.53	12.79	4.19	3.83	.000	1.15	3.58	.54

Note: 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, FIOI= Fear of Important Others Losing Interest, FUIO= Fear of Upsetting Important Others. CI = Confidence interval; LL = Lower limit; UL = Upper limit

DISCUSSION:

Findings of our study proved that sportsmen scored higher than their female counterparts on performance fear appraisal inventory. Fear of failure was described as the motive to avoid failure in achievement setting due to the anticipatory shame. Further understanding about fear of failure came after the development of multi-dimensional model in sports psychology. This model had a hierarchical design and was built on cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion. According to this model when an athlete interprets a particular competitive situation as having the potential of negative consequences it triggers his or her believes about failing and it leads to state anxiety that is associated with fear of failure (Gómez-López et al., 2020). Fear of failure can affect the athlete in four ways, their wellbeing, their interpersonal behavior, their sporting performance and finally their academic work (Sagar & Stoeber, 2009).

In a study by Jeyavelmurugan et al., (2012) the gender differences in fear of failure among inter colligate volleyball players were assessed using PFAI. A total of 60 players were included in the study with equal representation from both the genders. Results indicated that male athletes exhibited higher general fear as compared to female. Male athletes had mean score of 32.50 while female athletes had a mean score of 12.17. They further reported that male athletes scored higher on fear of shame and embarrassment and fear of devaluing one's self esteem which are also consistent with our results.

Furthermore Krista et al., (2013) conducted a study to evaluate the gender differences in fear of failure among university level engineering students. The authors used PFAI as the measurement tool. Multivariate analysis of variance showed that females had a higher level of fear of failure as compared to male students. Comparison of subscales of the fear appraisal inventory showed that female students were significantly more likely to experience embarrassment or shame in front of others, lower believes regarding their skills and abilities. However, the female students did not show more concern that important loved ones in their life have lost interest in them or greater fear that significant others would be angry or upset at them than their male counterparts. Our results also showed that female had lower fear of important others losing interest and lower fear of upsetting important others as compared to males. Our findings that females had greater fear of having an uncertain future was also supported by this study.

Fear of failure in student athletes with respect to interpersonal antisocial behavior in education and sports was studied by Sagar et al., (2011). Female athletes reported higher fear of devaluing of self-esteem as compared to their male counterparts. This may be related to their lower competence level according to this study. Male athletes on the contrary registered higher threat to their social standing and more fear of significant others losing interest. Another study reported that females have higher fear of shame and embarrassment along with fear of devaluing one's self esteem as compared to males (Partridge & Elison, 2012).

In another study consisting of 479 handball players results indicated that sports roles are perceived differently by male and female athletes. When it comes to fear of failure sportsmen attribute more importance to social acceptance while sportswomen attribute more importance to internal factors and less importance to opinions of others. The results of this study showed that overall fear of failure was higher in male athletes. Male athletes also showed higher levels of an uncertain future, losing the interest of important others and upsetting important others on the other hand female athletes had higher levels of shame and devaluing one's self-esteem (Gómez-López et al., 2019).

CONCLUSIONS:

It was concluded that sportsmen exhibited higher levels of overall fear of failure as compared to sportswomen. Furthermore, it was proved that female athletes had higher levels of Fear of having an uncertain future as compared to male athletes. Sportsmen scored higher on the other subscales of performance fear appraisal inventory as compared to sportswomen.

Disclosure:

There is no conflict of interest and no financial/funding from any source involved in conducting this study.

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