

PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO COPING WITH ANXIETY IN SPORTS COMPETITIONS

Fidelia Ochuko Ogaga

Human Kinetics and Sports Science Uni, Department of Science Education, Faculty of Education, University of Delta, Agbor

Abstract

This article examines the psychological approach to managing anxiety during athletic competition. All levels of athletes' programs encounter anxiety regularly. The majority of athletes they work with are athletes who are anxious about performing well during contests. When the physical symptoms of anxiety are sufficiently severe, they may substantially impair an athlete's ability to participate. Anxiety can affect an athlete's performance before, during, or after sporting activities. Types of anxiety are trait and state anxiety, and causes of anxiety

range from high expectations from one's self, chronic, peer group, fear, and stress. This paper highlighted types of anxiety disorders, which range from generalized anxiety to medication-induced anxiety disorder. The psychological approach to coping with anxiety was discussed according to the following subheadings: anxiety a state-like, tract and meta-experience, the implication for coping, multidimensionally of anxiety, the IZOF model as a framework for anxiety-centred, anxiety content dimension and anxiety intensity dimension, as well as competition pattern and skill stabilization.

Keywords: Psychological Approach, Anxiety, and sports Competitions.

Introduction

Over time, anxiety is a prominent feature that impacts athletes' performance in sports due to various underlying variables, including psychological stress and fear issues. It is an emotional characteristic marked by tension, anxious thoughts, and bodily changes in response to demanding circumstances like giving a public speech or passing an exam. When anxiety becomes enormous, overwhelming, and interferes with everyday life, it is merely a sign of an underlying illness. Many of us might experience anxiety, feeling worn out and hopeless (Cuncic, 2020; Jenkins, 2019). The body's natural reaction to stress is anxiety. It is a sensation of dread or trepidation about what is ahead. Anxiety is described as "an emotion marked by feelings of tension, anxious thoughts, and bodily changes, such as elevated blood pressure" by the American Psychological Association (APA). Anxiety is natural and essential for survival when someone is exposed to potentially dangerous or frightening causes (medicalnewstoday.com). The "fight-or-flight" response, triggered when there is danger, is brought on by an increase in the hormone and chemical messenger adrenalin. This equips people to fight against prospective threats or flee safety. A natural continuation of the original "fight-or-flight" response is the uneasy feeling before a significant life event or amid a challenging scenario.

The anxiety of getting struck by an automobile while crossing the street or doing sports might still be crucial to survival (Medics Lab, 2017). According to the medical definition of anxiety, it is a condition characterized by psychological and bodily symptoms brought on by a worry about a perceived threat. It states that anxiety can vary depending on the circumstance and the person. In sports, this means that a golfer, for instance, could feel more anxious playing in a natural event than a club competition. Another person can have the same anxieties during a club tournament at

the exact moment (McCanny, 2021). In general, psychologists distinguish between two categories of anxiety: State anxiety refers to momentary sensations of worry in a particular scenario, whereas trait anxiety refers to a personality feature in which a person's anxiousness is a consistent personality attribute. Therefore, as opposed to someone who only feels anxious under challenging situations, someone with an anxious disposition may find a variety of ordinary duties distressing (McCanny, 2021). Sports anxiety, sometimes known as "choking," is a reduced level of athletic performance brought on by tensions related to a sporting event. The sensation interferes with the athlete's ability to perform, going beyond the usual anxiety experienced before an event. Athletes who have sports anxiety perform poorly and may lose confidence and self-esteem. Although athletes have coping mechanisms for worry, coaches may assist them in addressing the issue mentally before it results in more serious adverse effects (Rider University, 2021). This essay discusses the psychological method of dealing with anxiety in sporting events due to anxiety's substantial repercussions on athletic performance.

Causes of Sports Anxiety

Any competitive physical activity or game that tries to utilize, maintain, or enhance physical skills while satisfying participants and occasionally entertaining viewers is considered a sport (SportAccord, 2016). Anxiety over performance can result from high expectations for oneself, family, and friends. Social media can worsen the problem by enabling the rapid international dissemination of news and videos of individual sporting accomplishments. According to Rider University (2021), the high-profile nature of competing in front of an audience makes it even more stressful when combined with these common sources of sports anxiety:

Returning from Injury: Concern about the responsibilities and commitments to what success brings.

Unhealthy Lifestyle: Failure to get the sleep and nutrition required for good physical and mental health.

Perfectionism: Feeling that any mistake makes a performance unworthy.

Post-Game: Negative feedback that affects the mindset.

Stress

Stress is a state of stress, either emotionally or physically. It is a persistent emotional tension brought on by an unfulfilled yearning need. Various environmental causes, such as strikes, unpaid wages, invalidated election results, subpar athletic achievements, etc., cause stress. These forces are imposed directly by other people or indirectly via man-made social structures or institutions (Quinn, 2020). When in a stressful circumstance, there are three stages that one goes through. First is the "alarm stage" of experiencing difficulty, and then the person moves on to the "problem-resistant stage." Finally, he has had enough of "the universal adaption syndrome" third. One of the characteristics of the idea of stress is that it discusses interactions between an organism and its environment. A condition or circumstance can't qualify as a stress stimulus or stressor without endangering or causing physiological harm.

Similarly, an organism's internal reactions cannot be described as stress unless they are brought on by external substances that cause internal reactions (Lazarus, 2014). Eustress, or stress that strengthens a person in a particular environment, is the term for stress that leads to good behaviour. Stress that threatens to impair fundamental necessities, the nervous system's ability to maintain homeostasis, or a person's ability to grow and develop is known as distress (Smith, 2018).

Signs of Stress

Self-observation and clinical evaluation are two methods to determine when someone is stressed. While the self-observation method is realistically feasible, a professionally qualified staff member is required for the clinical evaluation. The basics of other people's self-observation are the signals. Smith (2018) lists the following indications that will be seen:

- Hyperactivity, irritation, and depression
- increased palpitations, irregular heartbeats, impulsive behaviour, and emotional instability that overrides the desire to fight or exhibit violent behaviours
- Unreality-like sensation
- insomnia
- psychosis and neurosis

Fear

Fear is a primal, strong, and common human emotion. Both a widespread physiological reaction and a strong personal emotional reaction are involved. Fear serves as a warning sign for pressure from danger or the possibility of injury, whether that risk is psychological or physical. Fear may come from both real and imagined risks, as well as from actual threats on occasion. Various mental health conditions, such as anxiety disorders, phobias, and post-traumatic stress disorder, can all show symptoms of fear (Fritscher, 2020). Fear primarily comprises two physiological and emotional responses to a perceived danger.

Biochemical Reaction: Fear is a natural emotion and a survival mechanism. When one confronts a perceived threat, his body responds in specific ways. Physical reactions to fear include sweating, increased heart rate, and high adrenaline levels, making us extremely alert. This physical response is also known as the “fight or flight” response, with which the body prepares to enter combat or run away. This biochemical reaction is likely an evolutionary development. It’s an automatic response that is crucial to our survival.

Emotional Response: The emotional response to fear, on the other hand, is highly personalized because fear involves some of the same chemical reactions in our brains that positive emotions like happiness and excitement do; feeling fear under certain circumstances can be seen as fun, like when you watch scary movies (Fritscher, 2020).

Symptoms of Fear

Fear frequently causes both physical and emotional side effects. Although each individual may feel fear uniquely, Fritscher (2020) lists the following as some of the prevalent indications and symptoms of fear:

- fast pulse, dry mouth, and chest discomfort
- breathing difficulties, trembling, sweating, and an upset stomach

Signs of Sports Anxiety

Another who is anxious before a game can feel disoriented or challenging to concentrate, but this usually passes as the action starts. However, stress doesn't end there for athletes with sports anxiety because it can also result in physiological symptoms like:

- accelerated breathing and elevated heart rate
- clammy, sweaty hands, a dry mouth and throat, a trembling voice, impaired eyesight, and nausea

Anxiety Disorders

A set of mental diseases known as anxiety disorders produce intense and ongoing dread and terror. One may avoid social situations such as family gatherings, work, and school due to extreme anxiety to prevent the onset or aggravation of their symptoms.

Types of Anxiety Disorders

Generalized Anxiety Disorder: Unnecessarily excessive and unrealistic stress and concern for little to no reason.

Panic Disorder: One feels sudden, intense fear that brings on a panic attack. During a panic attack, one may break out in a sweat, have chest pain, have a pounding heartbeat, choke, or have a heart attack.

Social Anxiety Disorder, Also called social phobia, is overwhelming worry and self-consciousness about everyday social situations.

Specific Phobias: One fears a specific object or situation, such as heights or flying. The fear goes beyond what is appropriate and may cause one to avoid ordinary situations.

Agoraphobia: One has an intense fear of being in a place where it seems complicated to escape or get help if an emergency occurs.

Separation Anxiety: The separation from reality when one loses a loved partner or feels anxious when someone leaves one's sight.

Selective Mutism: This is a form of social anxiety in which young children who regularly converse with their family avoid speaking in front of others, such as in classrooms.

Medication-induced anxiety disorder: Some anxiety disorder symptoms can be brought on by using certain legal or illicit substances or by stopping their use (Rider University, 2021).

Coping Mechanism of Anxiety in Sports Competitions

To try to master, limit, or accept stress and anxiety, coping implies intentionally addressing interpersonal and personal difficulties. There are three fundamental coping mechanisms: task-oriented, emotional-oriented, and avoidance-oriented. Coping mechanisms are standard ways of dealing with stressful situations (medics lab, 2017).

Only one component of the interactions between people and their environments (P - E) is covered by the concept of anxiety as an emotional stress-induced reaction. It is essential to employ a construct that encompasses the traits of the two interdependent components. Psychology can investigate P-E interaction by studying the experience connecting to a person's attitude toward the environment and examining the meaning of the environment for this person. In addition to having a biosocial direction, experience is best characterized as the outcome of awareness. Therefore, the examination of any given event should concentrate less on the circumstance or the individual concerned and more on how that circumstance is seen by that individual (Hanin, 2016).

Performance-related experience, a part of human functioning that reflects the nature of previous, ongoing, or predicted A-E interaction, is at the core of coping mechanisms. The P-E interactions involve the predominance of an organism over an environment over an organism as links between task demands (constraints) and a person's resources. When task demands are viewed as burdensome or surpassing the person's capacity, performance-related anxiety typically implies a breakdown in P-E connections. According to this viewpoint, managing specific external and internal demands deemed demanding or surpassing a person's resources requires "constantly altering cognitive and behavioural efforts" (Folkman, 2014).

Anxiety as State-like, Trait-like, and Meta-Experience: State-like, trait-like, and meta-experiences are three linked categories of experiences. An athlete's state-like experience of anxiety defines how tense, anxious, uncertain, or concerned they felt in a particular circumstance that they considered dangerous. The intensity of this experience varies significantly across athletes in the same scenario and between athletes in other situations. Anxiety experiences that resemble traits are characterized by reasonably consistent patterns of the athlete's regular (habitual) emotional reaction to similar circumstances. The frequency with which an athlete exhibits high anxiety and feels tight, anxious, or fearful before or during competition is their trait anxiety. The person's knowledge of anxiety's negative or positive impacts on performance and attitudes and preferences for high or low anxiety are all characterized by their meta-experiences (Hanin, 2016). Meta-experiences influence the evaluation and reevaluation of performance conditions and the choice of coping mechanisms used by athletes who have encountered various performance scenarios.

Implication for Coping: It is helpful to distinguish between state-trait and meta-experiences to choose appropriate coping mechanisms. Real, optimum, dysfunctional, predicted, and intensity zones of state-like anxiety can first be recognized. Second, trait-like anxiety is evaluated to see whether the current trends may serve as possible obstacles to anxiety treatment (old habits in

emotional responses). Finally, managing this response is necessary to prevent its possible negative impact on evaluations and re-appraisals because meta-anxiety, or attitudes about having anxiety (or "worrying about worrying"), dictates the requirement for management (Hanin, 2016).

Multidimensionally of Anxiety and Coping: The Individual Zones of Optimal Functioning (IZOF) paradigm proposes five fundamental dimensions: "form, content, intensity, context, and time," which explain the distinctive features of state-like experience as a component of psychosocial (PBS) performance-related state (Hanin, 2013). As a result, anxiety is an emotional experience that always manifests in some way (in terms of subjectivity perceived or observable) and has a particular content (or quality). It is also characterized quantitatively and qualitatively by its intensity, and as an emotional process, it develops over time (Folkman, 2014). According to the form dimension, state anxiety manifests itself in a way that is functionally connected to several different aspects of psychosocial states. Cognitive (alert, focused, confused, distracted), affective (worried, nervous, happy, angry, joyful, fearful), motivational (motivated, willing, desirous, interested), vocational (determined, brave, daring, persistent), and bodily (tired, jittery, restless, sweaty, painless, breathless) are some of the component labels with chosen descriptors (Hanin, 2013).

A Framework for Anxiety-Centered Coping Using the IZOF Model: Emotion is a part of the psychosocial state, which is viewed as a situational, multi-modal, and dynamic representation of the complete human functioning, according to the IZOF model, which was established in the naturalistic environment of top athletics (Hanin, 2016). The IZOF model makes several empirically verified emotional- and action-focused coping assumptions. For instance, each athlete has a constellation of individually optimum and dysfunctional emotion content characterized by athlete-generated idiosyncratic signals and an optimal anxiety level (high, moderate, or low). The idea of "optimal intensity zones" considers individual variations in an athlete's capacity to mobilize and effectively use available resources. Positive and negative emotions that provide energizing and organizing effects reflect the availability of based and emergency resources and their successful recruitment and usage—organizing effects and dysfunctional painful and pleasurable feelings, though. In contrast, the disenergizing and disorganizing impacts of emotions on performance are caused by dysfunctional happy and unpleasant emotions reflecting a shortage of resources due to poor recruitment and usage (Smith, 2018).

Anxiety Content Dimension: According to available anxiety measures, researchers can create labels for anxiety content as a negatively-toned emotional experience or use unique (athlete-generated) markers instead. The individual-oriented approach is particularly pertinent in high-accomplishment sports, and the emotional experiences' content is defined according to two linked factors: functioning (success-failure) and feeling (good-bad). The four categories include failure-related dysfunctional unpleasant (N -) and pleasant (P -) emotions, as well as success-related functionally optimum pleasant (P+) and unpleasant (N+) emotions. These four classifications make it easier to pinpoint the peculiar names of emotional experiences necessary for performance and indicate an athlete's level of preparedness to compete (Hanin, 2013). The classification of emotion content effectively groups 15 distinct emotions into four areas of evaluation. While the result category contains the harmful feelings (anger, sad, disappointment, guilt, and disgust) and the benefit emotions (confidence, optimism, and eating), the anticipatory category includes

dangerous emotions (worried, scared, and nervous) and challenging emotions (confident, hopeful, and eater) (exhilarated, pleased, happy, relieved). Anticipatory anxiety (danger, emotion) makes up the majority of pre-competitive anxiety. Mid-event and post-event experiences contain categories of emotions related to intermediate or ultimate outcomes (injury or benefit) (Hanin, 2013; Robaszka, 2016).

The measure of anxiety intensity: Due to the high inter-individual heterogeneity of optimum anxiety, individual-focused tests and coping strategies are advised over group-focused ones. According to research, athletes experiencing high or low anxiety levels perform effectively in roughly 65% of cases. The "in-out of zone" idea describes the link between anxiety and performance at the individual level and contends that an ideal degree of anxiety (high, moderate, or low) positively impacts performance. Athletes perform to their full ability if absolute anxiety levels are within the previously identified ideal intensity range. An athlete is more likely to perform below their potential if their actual anxiety level is outside of their ideal range (Hammons & Diener, 2015).

Skill stabilization and competition patterns: Increased intellectual and physical self-awareness of competent performance results from control and shape monitoring. Additionally, it shows how prepared the athlete is to execute in ideal (and often steady) practice circumstances to the best of her ability. Control and monitoring are often finished once an athlete develops a competition pattern that includes an effective focus, an appropriate ratio of exciting effort, and one or two key chain elements influencing the outcomes. The athlete may free up her attention resources and pay greater attention to the external conditions thanks to this uniform pattern of individually ideal technique. Creating the brief competition model with fewer movement compounds will require this knowledge. The idea of ideal performance serves as the foundation for the competition model for efficient regulation of individual performance. Examining inadequate performance can help you spot chronic mistakes and their common causes, such as confusion, poor or ineffective focus, difficulty refocusing, or excessive effort (Hanin, 2016).

Correction of Habitual Performance Errors: Using the Old Way-New Way with elite athletes to quickly address repetitive performance faults within the context of the psychology domain demonstrates that some techniques may be successfully used in sports. Thought should be given to several conceptual and practical approaches representing expert performance in high-achievement environments. First, error analysis (Old Way) describes the athletes' subjective performance assessments using notions of task components and chains of components. Second, it can be either a link in the chain or an interaction between links, and it is best discovered when an athlete intentionally pushes themselves too hard during training or under pressure during competition. To discover personal optimum and suboptimal performance, an error analysis review of an individual's best and worst performance is conducted (Hanin, 2017).

Conclusion

The main problem in sports psychology is arousal. Notably, the performer's arousal degree affects their physical and technical performance. On the other hand, arousal is governed by physiological processes like emotions, which depend on more advanced cognitive processes like thinking. Arousal and anxiety are associated with a sports environment. Arousal and activation of

the nervous system are both factors in the unpleasant emotional state of anxiety, which is characterized by emotions of concern, uneasiness, and apprehension. Sport psychology specialists have generally acknowledged the potential for high stress and anxiety levels in competitive sports. A competitive athlete's success now includes training in and using various psychological techniques to overcome possible negative emotional states like anxiety associated with sports. Among the most contentious areas of sports psychology are the theoretical connections connected to performance anxiety in sports. Therefore, highlighting the psychological strategy for coping with anxiety in skills sports competitions fits within the context of this research.

Recommendations

The recommendations made for the paper are as follows:

1. Sports psychologists should be made available to regulate athletes' training.
2. Coaches and trainers should have basic knowledge of psychology.
3. Sports psychology should be made compulsory for all human kinetics and sports experts.
4. Useful psychological hints should be made available to coming-up athletes.
5. Depressed athletes should regularly encounter psychological sessions.
6. Coaches should try to counsel their athletes to curb anxiety and fear before and during competitions.

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