

## **COPING STYLES AND SELF-ESTEEM IN SPORTS AND NON-SPORTS MEN AND WOMEN<sup>#</sup>**

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*The present study deals with the patterns of the effects of the participation in sports and sex of the individual on coping styles and self-esteem. The sample comprised of 120 subjects (60 sports persons and 60 non-sports persons). Each group was further divided into 30 men and 30 women. A 2 x 2 ANOVA indicates significant main effects of sports participation and sex of the individual on self-esteem scores. The results show no significant main effects of sports participation and sex of the individual on coping scores. Furthermore, application of the Least Significant Differences test suggests that men (sports persons and non-sports persons and women non-sports persons show higher self-esteem scores than women sports persons.*

The study of man's reactions to conditions of intense psychological stress has been a major concern of social scientists. Over the years psychologists have devoted much attention to the ways by which people cope with stressful situations. Lazarus (1966) was among the first who recognized the importance of studying responses to stress and to develop a transactional framework to study the person's role in appraisal of and active defense against threats or harms associated with stressors. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as the process of managing demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resource of the person. It refers to a person's active efforts to resolve stress and to create ways of handling new situations at each life stage

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(Erickson, 1959). Coping is an important aspect of human adaptation which helps an individual to maintain a sense of personal integrity and achieve greater personal control over the environment. Acute stress in sports such as errors, penalties, or unpleasant comments from spectators can negatively influence numerous cognitive and psychophysiological processes (Anshel, 1990; Matheny, Aycock, Pugh, Curlette, & Cannella, 1986). In extreme cases the inability to cope with persistent bouts of active stress in sports may lead to decreased motivation, emotional distress, poor athletic performance, and eventually psychological burnout and withdrawal from competitive sports for both adult competitors (Smith, 1986), and younger competitors (Scalan & Passer, 1979). Although acute stress is inherent in competitive sports athletes can reduce its impact on their emotion and performance by using effective coping strategies (Anshel, Brown, & Brown, 1993).

The act of coping does not imply an effective outcome in reducing distress. However, as Compas (1987) noted, it merely reflects a strategy and does not ensure the reduction of unpleasant emotions. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggested that coping and appraisal are influenced by individual differences in psychological vulnerability in personal resources and capacities. Individual differences in coping success may arise from a number of sources including age, personality variables, etc. (Chan, 1977; Fleishman, 1984; McCrae & Costa, 1986).

Self-esteem is a set of attitudes and beliefs that a person brings with himself or herself when facing the world. In psychological terms self-esteem provides a mental set that prepares the person to respond according to expectations of success, acceptance, and personal strength. Several researchers have documented the athletes' higher self-esteem as compared to non-athletes (e.g., Higgins, 1980; Mahoney, 1989; Trujillo, 1983). Research shows a link between the athletes' greater physical endurance, coordination, and reflexes; and a more positive body image which could in-turn generalize to athletes' over all self-esteem (Bird & Cripe, 1986; Devies, 1989; Riordan, Thomas, & James, 1983).

While there is considerable literature available on coping behavior as a personality variable amongst the general population, categorically speaking how sports persons cope with the stressful situations has not been widely touched.

The present study is conducted to see if the sports persons are different from the non-sports persons in the usage of the different

coping strategies and whether self-esteem is an important variable as related to coping behaviour.

## METHOD

### Sample

A stratified random sample of 120 subjects (60 sports persons (SP) and 60 non-sports persons (NSP)) was examined on the two measures. In each group there were 30 men (M), and 30 women (W). The age range of the sample was 18 to 25 years (men mean age = 20.4 years and women mean age = 20.6 years).

### Instrument

#### *Coping Checklist*

Developed by Rao, Subbakrishna, and Prabhu (1989), the Coping Checklist is comprised of 70 items describing a broad range of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive responses that may be used to handle stress. Items are scored dichotomously, Yes/No indicative of presence or absence of a particular coping behaviour. The total number of items reported by an individual is indicative of the size of the coping repertoire.

#### *Self-esteem Inventory*

Self-esteem Inventory (Cooper, 1987) is designed to measure evaluative attitudes towards the self. This inventory consists of 25 items. All of the items are short statements and answered in two response categories 'like me' or 'unlike me'. Scoring was done according to the instructions in manual.

### Procedure

The instruments were administered to the subjects along with a form inquiring their age and sex.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

An ANOVA using a 2 x 2 factorial design, with sex and sports participation as the independent variables, was computed for each of the dependent variables (cognitive coping style, behavioral coping style, emotional coping style, and self-esteem). The results do not show

any significant main and interactive effects of sports participation and sex on the coping variables. However, significant effects were found for self-esteem scores.

Table 1

*Mean scores of self esteem (Participation in Sports and Sex)*

| Sports Persons | Sex   |       |       |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|
|                | Men   | Women |       |
| 15.05          | 16.43 | 16.31 | 15.16 |

Table 2

*Summary of two-way analysis of variance of self esteem scores*

| Source of Variation         | SS   | df  | MS    | F      |
|-----------------------------|------|-----|-------|--------|
| A (Participation in sports) | 57.3 | 1   | 57.30 | 8.07** |
| B (Sex)                     | 39.6 | 1   | 39.60 | 5.57*  |
| AB                          | 66.1 | 1   | 66.10 | 9.30** |
| Within groups (Error)       | 82.4 | 116 | 7.10  |        |

\* $F_{95}(1, 116) = 3.92$ ; \*\* $F_{99}(1, 116) = 6.84$

Table 2 reveals that the main effects of sports participation and sex of the individual are found to be significant. It also reveals a highly significant interactions effect between the two variables, i.e., the effect of sports participation and sex of the individual.

The main effect of sports participation was found to be significant [ $F(1, 116) = 8.07, p < .01$ ] for self-esteem-scores. A perusal of the Table 1 shows that the non-sports people scored higher on self-esteem scale ( $M = 16.43$ ) than the sports persons ( $M = 15.05$ ), suggesting a higher self-esteem in non-sports persons than the sports persons. This finding is in contrast to the previous research (Mahoney, 1989) where sports persons have shown a higher self-esteem than the non-sports persons. It is quite probable that factors like a small sample size, success in sports, type of sport, etc. might have influenced the results. Further, the possibility of self-esteem in sports persons probably because of some experiences leading to negative self evaluation

(e.g., poor feedback, increased demands in performance, poor performance, etc.) also can not be overruled. Success and high self-esteem go hand in hand.

The main effect of the sex of the individual was found to be significant at [ $F(1, 116) = 5.57, p < .05$ ]. The means show that men have a higher self-esteem ( $M= 16.31$ ) than the women ( $M= 15.16$ ). The higher self-esteem scores of men can be explained in terms of different orientations of men and women. Men, particularly in Indian society, are socialized in such a manner that they hold themselves at a higher position than the women. It is noteworthy that, though men and women possess different potentialities, these differences are amplified more through the socialization process (Wilmare, 1975) which encourages men to develop their potentials as compared to women and hence, reflect in their self-esteem scores.

Table 3

*LSD test on differences between treatment means*

|        |       | <i>S(W)</i> | <i>NSP(M)</i> | <i>SP(M)</i> | <i>NSP(W)</i> |
|--------|-------|-------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
|        |       | 13.60       | 16.26         | 16.36        | 16.60         |
| SP (W) | 13.60 | -           | 2.66*         | 2.76*        | 3.00*         |
| NSP(M) | 16.26 | -           | -             | 0.10         | 0.34          |
| SP(M)  | 16.36 | -           | -             | -            | 0.24          |
| NSP(W) | 16.60 | -           | -             | -            | -             |

$p < .01$

As the interactive effect between the two independent variables has been found to be statistically significant at [ $F(1, 116) = 9.30, p < .01$ ], it suggests that the two variables interact with each other in their effects on self-esteem scores. To find out the locus of interaction, Least Significant Differences (LSD) test was applied. Table 3 reveals significant differences between some treatment means. The men sports persons score higher than women sports persons (2.76,  $p < .01$ ) on self-esteem scores. Women non-sports persons score higher than women sports persons (3.00,  $p < .01$ ) on self-esteem. Lower self-esteem scores in women sports person may be a result of the negative evaluation made for women participation in sports, because participation in sports makes them more tough minded, aggressive, etc., which are not considered to be feminine traits. Taylor (1983) and Vallerand (1983) have indicated that positive feedback from others is essential for the

development and maintenance of self-esteem.

Further, the results also suggest that men non-sports persons also score higher on self-esteem scores than women sports persons (2.66,  $p < .01$ ). All the other differences were found to be statistically non-significant.

It is very clear from the results that males, whether they are sports persons or non-sports persons, have a higher level of self-esteem than the females and non-sports persons show higher self-esteem than the sports people.

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