



MENTAL TOUGHNESS AND ATHLETIC COPING SKILLS AMONG YOUNG ADULT ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the relationship between mental toughness and athletic coping skills among young adult male and female athletes. A total of 100 participants (50 Male and 50 Female), aged 18-25 years, were selected using convenient sampling method. Mental Toughness was assessed using Mental Toughness Questionnaire, and Athletic Coping Skills were measured using the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory (ACSI-28). Results showed that male athletes exhibited significantly higher levels of mental toughness and coping skills compared to female athletes, strong positive correlations were found between Mental Toughness and Athletic Coping Skills in both genders. These findings underscore the importance of integrating psychological training into sports programs to enhance athlete's resilience and performance.

Keywords: Athletic Coping Skills, Gender Differences, Mental Toughness, Psychological Resilience, Young Adult Athletes

1. INTRODUCTION

In the realm of competitive sports, mental toughness and coping skills are increasingly recognized as essential psychological assets that distinguish elite performers from their peers. While physical training builds strength and endurance, it is the athlete's psychological resilience that often determines their ability to thrive under pressure, bounce back from failure, and maintain consistent performance. Mental toughness provides the foundation for focus and persistence, while athletic coping skills enable athletes to manage stress, regulate emotions, and recover from setbacks. These two constructs are not only interconnected but also mutually reinforcing—athletes who are mentally tough are better equipped to apply effective coping strategies, and those with strong coping mechanisms tend to build greater mental resilience over time.

Mental toughness refers to an athlete's ability to remain confident, focused, and composed during high-pressure situations. It encompasses traits such as emotional control, motivation, and the capacity to persevere through adversity. Mentally tough athletes are characterized by their ability to rebound quickly from setbacks, manage competitive stress, and stay goal-oriented despite external distractions or internal doubts. Unlike innate talent, mental toughness is a trainable skill that can be cultivated through deliberate psychological conditioning, coaching, and experience. Research has shown that athletes with higher levels of mental toughness tend to perform more consistently and experience less anxiety during competition.

“Mental Toughness is a personality trait which determines, in large part, how people respond to challenge, stress and pressure, irrespective of their circumstances”. (Clough & Strycharczyk 2012)

“The capacity for an individual to deal effectively with stressors, pressures and challenge and perform to the best of their abilities, irrespective of the circumstances in which they find themselves”. (Clough & Earle 2002)

Athletic coping skills, on the other hand, are the psychological tools athletes use to handle the emotional and situational demands of sport. These skills include concentration, goal-setting, emotional regulation, and maintaining composure under pressure. Coping in sports involves both problem-focused strategies, such as tactical adjustments, and emotion-focused approaches, like relaxation techniques or cognitive reframing. Athletes who possess strong coping skills are better able to adapt to unexpected challenges, such as performance slumps or unfavourable outcomes, without allowing stress to undermine their focus or motivation. Developing these skills not only improves performance but also supports athletes' long-term mental health and well-being.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Selection of Subjects

The subjects for the present study consisted of 100 young adult athletes, with an equal number of male (n=50) and female (n=50) participants. The subjects were selected using a convenient sampling technique from various colleges and sports academies. All participants were actively engaged in competitive sports at either the college or district level. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 25 years.

2.2 Selection of Variables

The study focused on two major psychological variables: Mental Toughness and Athletic Coping Skills. To measure these variables, standardized psychological tools were used. The Mental Toughness Questionnaire (MTQ) developed by Goldberg (1998) was used to assess an athlete's psychological resilience across five dimensions. The Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI-28) developed by Smith et al. (1995) was employed to evaluate various coping

dimensions such as goal setting, coachability, confidence, peaking under pressure, and freedom from worry.

2.3 Statistical Analysis

To compare mental toughness and athletic coping skills between male and female young adult athletes, an independent samples t-test was conducted. In order to determine the relationship between mental toughness and athletic coping skills, correlation was applied separately for male and female groups. The level of significance for all statistical tests was set at 0.05 & 0.01.

3. RESULTS

TABLE-1
MEAN, SD AND T-VALUE OF MTQ AMONG MALE AND FEMALE YOUNG ADULT ATHLETES

Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p
Male	50	20.4	4.68	2.008	Sig*
Female	50	18.5	4.69		

*Significant at 0.05 level

In Table-1, mental toughness was measured using the Mental Toughness Questionnaire among male and female young adult athletes, the t-value was **2.008**, which was significant at 0.05 level and thus indicating that there is a significant difference in regard to gender for mental toughness among athletes.

TABLE-2
MEAN, SD AND T-VALUE OF ACSI AMONG MALE AND FEMALE YOUNG ADULT ATHLETES

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p
Male	50	58.2	11.9	3.8	Sig***
Female	50	49.7	10.16		

***Significant at both levels (0.05 & 0.01)

In Table-2, athletic coping skills were measured among male and female young adult athletes, the t-value was **3.8**, which was significant at both levels i.e., 0.05 and 0.01 and thus indicating that there is a significant difference in regard to gender for the use of athletic coping skills among athletes.

TABLE-3
CORRELATION VALUE BETWEEN MTQ AND ACSI AMONG MALE YOUNG ADULT ATHLETES

Variable	N	r	p
MTQ	50	0.86	Sig***
ACSI	50		

***Significant at both levels (0.05 & 0.01)

In Table-3, correlation (r) between MTQ (Mental Toughness Questionnaire) and ACSI (Athletic Coping Skills Inventory) scores for male athletes was found to be **0.86**, indicating a strong positive relationship between the two variables, which suggests that as mental toughness increases, athletic coping skills also tend to improve significantly.

TABLE-4
CORRELATION VALUE BETWEEN MTQ AND ACSI AMONG FEMALE YOUNG ADULT ATHLETES

Variable	N	r	p
MTQ	50	0.84	Sig***
ACSI	50		

***Significant at both levels (0.05 & 0.01)

In Table-4, the correlation (r) between MTQ (Mental Toughness Questionnaire) and ACSI (Athletic Coping Skills Inventory) scores for female athletes was found to be **0.84**, indicating a strong positive relationship between the two variables, which suggests that as mental toughness increases, athletic coping skills also tend to improve significantly.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study revealed a significant difference between male and female young adult athletes in relation to mental toughness and athletic coping skills. The mean scores of male athletes were found to be higher than those of female athletes in both variables. It appears that male athletes possess better psychological resilience and are more adept at handling competitive pressure. The result of the present study is also in line with the findings of Andrews and Chen (2015), who reported that male runners scored significantly higher than female runners in overall mental toughness, particularly in aspects such as self-belief and visualization. They also observed that males predominantly used task-oriented coping strategies, while females were more likely to adopt disengagement coping styles.

The result of the present study also revealed a strong positive relationship between mental toughness and athletic coping skills among both male and female athletes. This suggests that athletes with greater mental resilience tend to exhibit better psychological coping mechanisms during competitive situations. The findings of this study are supported by the results of Ragab (2012), who found that a structured mental toughness training program significantly improved both mental toughness and athletic coping skills among national-level handball players. The players in the experimental group showed improvements not only in their psychological traits but also in their shooting performance, indicating a direct impact of mental skills on athletic outcomes.

Thus, the current study confirms that mental toughness and athletic coping skills are interconnected and vary with gender. Athletes with high mental toughness are better equipped to use coping strategies effectively, and male athletes, in particular, demonstrate higher scores in both areas. These findings reinforce the importance of implementing psychological training programs to enhance both mental resilience and stress management skills among athletes, especially with a gender-sensitive approach.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of mental toughness and athletic coping skills in the psychological profile of young adult athletes. Male athletes were found to possess higher levels of both mental toughness and coping skills compared to their female counterparts. Additionally, a strong positive correlation was observed between mental toughness and athletic coping skills in both genders, indicating that as one of these attributes strengthens, the other is likely to improve as well.

These results suggest that mental toughness and coping skills are interrelated components that contribute meaningfully to an athlete's ability to handle competitive stress and perform consistently under pressure. Developing both traits through structured psychological training can

enhance not only athletic performance but also long-term mental well-being. Therefore, coaches, educators, and sports psychologists should consider integrating mental skills training into regular athletic programs to support the holistic development of young athletes.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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