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## **The Styles of Coping with Stress in Team and Individual Athletes Based On Gender and Championship Level**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research is Prioritization coping with stress styles in individual and team athletes with an emphasis on gender and the level of championship. The population is 1092 athletes participate in team sports (volleyball, basketball, futsal and handball) and individual sports (ping pong, badminton, track & field, physical fitness, taekwondo and karate) with at least one year championship background. The sampling was selected by considering the lost subject 380 person one by one. For data collection in this research, has been used a 32 items questionnaire of Coping Scale Korea Athletes (CSKA) related to coping with stress styles. Questionnaires were distributed in pilot studies and their reliability was estimated  $\alpha = 0.81$ . Data has been analyzed by using Mann Whitney U and in the level of  $P = 0.05$ . The results of this research indicated that problem focused coping and emotional coping style were higher priority than avoidance coping style and intuitive coping style. Male use the avoidance coping more than female and individual athletes apply problem focused coping more than group athletes. There is significant difference among athletes with different levels of sport achievement only in avoidance coping. The athletes according to background, genus, and kind of sport, education and levels of sport achievement use different coping style which this subject should be considered by coaches.

**Key words:** problem focused coping style; emotional focused coping style; avoidance focused coping style; intuitive focused coping style.

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## Introduction

Stress is an impartible aspect of sports competitions. According to Lazarus (1984), the coping process includes cognitive measures and behavioral activities of the individual to manage stress, and it is an important adaptation process which can play an effective role in the emotional adjustment of athletes (1). In Besharat's point of view (2007), the spread of stressful factors in athletics like making physical or mental errors, experiencing pain and agony, losing, observing the success or cheating of a rival, the audience noise, getting fined by the referee, and getting reprehended by the coach make the necessity of effective coping skills inevitable in order to achieve athletic success while the inability to deal with the stressful factors efficiently to obtain athletic success and performance is harmful (2). Considering confrontation as a dynamic and interactive process, the circumstances causing mental tension, differences, the personal traits, demography, and psychology of people will be so significant. Anshel et al. (2001) had indicated that confrontation could be a function of age, record, situational factors, culture, gender, character, natural traits, competency level, and psychological resources (3). Anshel and GangYan (2008), Hammermeister and Burton (2004) had reported that stress has an inhibiting role on athletic performance and improves it unlike enhancing the coping skills (4, 5). One of the methods to coping with stress in this study is problem focused coping in which the individual takes a direct action to modify the stressful factor and achieve the desired goal. In the excitement-oriented method, the individual attempts to adjust the emotional states caused by the stressful factor in order to change its concept. In the avoidance focused coping style method, the individual avoids the stressful factor through negligence and concentration on other affairs. In the counter-intuitive or illuminative method, the individual creates adjustment approaches through prayers and trust in God (2, 6, 7). Researchers had indicated contradictory results regarding the priority of applying stress-coping methods in athletes, given gender, teamwork or individuality, and the ranks of medals. Madden, Summer, and Brown (1990), Roth and Cohen (1986) had grasped that the athletes of team sports such as basketball players, professional female football players, and rugby players use the

problem focused coping more than the avoidance focused coping style one during the match (8, 9). Krohne and Hindel (1988) had indicated that the avoidance focused coping is more common amongst athletes of individual fields such as ping pong, track and field, and wrestling (10). Chung (2000) had reported in another contradictory that sometimes athletes apply the intuitive coping style with prayers to coping with stressful situations and sometimes they keep themselves away from such situations actively (11).

There are also paradoxical results regarding the coping methods and sexual differences amongst athletes. Kausar (2004), Pensgaard and Roberts (2003), and Anshel et al. (1998) had found out in their researches that women choose the avoidance focused coping more than the active confrontation coping style with planning (12-14). Ptacek, Smith, and Dodge (1994) had understood that women use the emotional focused coping style and the avoidance focused coping style more, and men use the problem focused coping more (15). Results by Williams *et al.* (1992), Gaudreau *et al.* (2005), Gould *et al.* (1993), and Krohne *et al.* (1998) had indicated that elite athletes apply the avoidance focused coping more in stressful situations (10, 16-18). Holt *et al.* (2004), in a research conducted on female football champions, had found out that their priority to use the coping methods include the avoidance focused coping style method, extra practice, the problem focused coping style and emotional focused coping style in the form of social support (19). Considering the paradox in the results of researches on the use of stress-coping methods amongst athletes, knowing the correct ways of dealing with the matter has many applicative advantages, since it can provide the coaches and athletes with a lot of helpful information on the topic. Hence, the aim of the present study is to prioritize the stress-coping methods amongst group and individual athletes with an emphasis on the gender and championship level in the province of Mazandaran.

## Materials and Methods

This is a causal and comparative study. The population includes the entire athletes participating in the tournaments of group and individual fields in the province of Mazandaran at the student level (1,391 individuals) with at least one year of championship

experience. According to the Morgan's chart, the samples were calculated 380 individuals, given the possibility to diminish respectively.

To gather the necessary information, the Coping Scale Korea Athletes (CSKA), a 32-questions questionnaire, which calculates the stress-coping methods in four main dimensions of the problem focused coping style, emotional focused coping style, avoidance focused coping style, and intuitive focused coping style in the 5-value scale of Likert (from always with the numerical value of four to never with the numerical value of zero) was used (2).

Having been translated and discussed by ten experienced psychology and sports management professors, the questionnaire was distributed amongst 40 athletes of the population and validated using Chronbach's alpha test = 0.81. Not to mention, the internal consistency of each of these stress-coping

methods ranges from  $R = 0.71$  to  $R = 0.83$ . To analyze the data, given the abnormal distribution of data, the non-parametric statistical test of Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H at the meaningful level of  $p = 0.05$  has been used.

## Results

The results of the present study showed that the athletes of individual sports used the problem focused coping style more than the athletes of team sports did (Table 1).

It has been observed that men used the avoidance focused coping style more than women did (Table 2). Moreover, there has been a meaningful difference only in the avoidance focused coping style amongst athletes with different levels of championship (Table and figure 3).

**Table 1. Comparison of Coping Styles in athletes of individual and team sports**

Style of Coping	Sports Type	Mean $\pm$ SD	p
Problem focused	team	22.86 $\pm$ 4.52	0.001**
	individual	23.6 $\pm$ 4.71	
Emotional focused	team	21.39 $\pm$ 4.24	0.061
	individual	21.73 $\pm$ 4.09	
Avoidance focused	team	18.35 $\pm$ 4.27	0.529
	individual	18.16 $\pm$ 4.81	
Intuitive focused	team	19.52 $\pm$ 4.83	0/285
	individual	19.24 $\pm$ 4.87	

\*\* - Significance in 0.01

**Table 2. Comparison of Coping Styles in male and female athletes**

Style of Coping	Gender	Mean $\pm$ SD	p
Problem focused	female	23.17 $\pm$ 4.54	0.815
	male	23.14 $\pm$ 4.68	
Emotional focused	female	21.46 $\pm$ 4.12	0.447
	male	21.57 $\pm$ 4.23	
Avoidance focused	female	17.97 $\pm$ 4.24	0.015*
	male	18.53 $\pm$ 4.69	
Intuitive focused	female	19.32 $\pm$ 4.81	0/53
	male	19.49 $\pm$ 4.88	

\* - Significance in 0.05

**Table 3. Comparison of Coping Styles in athletes with different championship level**

Style of Coping	Sports Type	Mean $\pm$ SD	p
Problem focused	City	22.33 $\pm$ 4.16	0.173
	Provincial	22.94 $\pm$ 4.66	
	National	22.43 $\pm$ 4.54	
Emotional focused	City	18.67 $\pm$ 1.53	0.127
	Provincial	21.43 $\pm$ 4.27	
	National	21.67 $\pm$ 4.07	
Avoidance focused	City	14.67 $\pm$ 0.58	0.012*
	Provincial	17.96 $\pm$ 4.51	
	National	18.65 $\pm$ 4.46	
Intuitive focused	City	19.00 $\pm$ 4.79	0/19
	Provincial	19.16 $\pm$ 4.9	
	National	19.73 $\pm$ 4.84	

\* - Significance in 0.05

## Discussion

The results of this research indicated that the athletes of individual sports use the problem focused coping style more, comparing their counterparts in team sports. Kaissidis-Rodafinos *et al.* (1997), found out that the athletes of team sports use the problem focused coping style more than the avoidance focused coping style (20). According to Gaudreau *et al.* (2005) and Gould *et al.* (1993) the avoidance focused coping style is more common amongst the athletes of individual sports (16, 18). These findings do not match the results of researches conducted by Ramazaninejad (2009) and Anshel *et al.* (2001), because they have considered the avoidance focused coping more common amongst the athletes of team sports (3, 7). However, they are in consistence with Panahi's results (2011) indicating that the athletes of individual sports use the problem focused coping more (21). In another contradictory research, the results obtained by Philippe *et al.* (2004) indicated weight-lifters are only athletes, amongst those of individual sports, who seldom use the avoidance focused coping style (22). The researches have indicated that using the avoidance focused coping is more effective in unpredictable situations, because the emotional stimuli are moderated in this coping style and team sports bear more unpredictable situations than individual ones, on account of the fact that most of team sports are of open-are skills, so it seems that the athletes of these sports use the avoidance focused coping more.

The information obtained by analyzing the data indicates that there is a meaningful difference only in using the avoidance focused coping amongst men and women, and men use this coping style more than women do. The results of the present are opposing those of Panahi (2011), Day and Livingstone (2003), and Ramazaninejad *et al.* (2009), in terms of men using the avoidance focused coping more than women do (7, 21, 23). However, Anshel *et al.* (2001), Pensgaard and Roberts (2003) indicated the existence of a meaningful difference in using some of the

coping methods amongst men and women, which are consistent with the results of the present study (3, 13). However, Anshel *et al.* (2001), Pensgaard and Roberts (2003), Day and Livingstone (2003) had indicated the existence of a meaningful difference in using the stress-coping styles by men and women, which was in consistence with the present study (3, 13, 23). These researchers find the gender an effective factor in using the stress-coping method, yet it is not clear that these differences are caused by gender or other variables such as the competency level, the individuals' ability and their culture.

According to the results of this research, athletes bearing championships at country or province level use the avoidance focused coping more. These findings are consistent with the results by Gaudreau *et al.* (2005), Gould *et al.* (1993), Krohne and Hindel (1998), which showed that the national and elite athletes use the avoidance focused coping in stressful situations more (10, 16, 18). Also, they are not consistent with the results by Elkund *et al.* (1993), Aflatooni (2001), Gould *et al.* (1993), because they have not observed any meaningful difference amongst various championship levels (18, 24, 25).

## Conclusion

The contrast of results from different researches on using stress-coping methods by the athletes of different sports has indicated that there are other factors including the age range of the samples and filling in the questionnaires in uncompetitive situations, as well as age, gender, experience, and championship level, which might influence the type of confrontation. Nevertheless, the findings of this research may provide the athletes of championship level, coaches, and sports psychologists with very important key information in this realm so that they can teach their athletes the stress-coping methods in sports events in order for them to gain the desired result during sports competitions in an effort to enable them to use the different stress-coping methods in the correct and efficient way.

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