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An examination of sports anxiety in different adventure sports

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare the anxiety levels of participants engaged in two adventure water sports. Specifically, it aimed to contrast the anxiety levels of individuals participating in canoeing and kayaking. To meet the study's objectives, a total of twenty volunteers were recruited, with ten participants representing each sport. The average anxiety ratings for kayaking and canoeing were determined to be 21.53 ± 3.14 and 21.73 ± 3.15 , respectively. A p-value exceeding 0.05 suggested that the difference in anxiety levels between the two groups was not statistically significant. These findings suggest that the choice between kayaking and canoeing does not significantly impact the anxiety experienced by participants. This result supports the hypothesis that anxiety may be more significantly influenced by psychological factors, individual differences, and competition pressures rather than by the specific type of watercraft discipline. Future studies should use larger and more diverse sample sizes to validate these results and explore other potential sources of anxiety in water-based sports. Understanding anxiety in these settings is crucial for maximizing athlete performance and well-being.

Keywords: Adventure sports, athletes, sports anxiety, psychology, mental health

Introduction

Anxiety is a common phenomenon in sports, as sports psychology experts have frequently observed, particularly in competitive settings. Consequently, the development and implementation of psychological strategies to mitigate the negative emotional states associated with sports-related anxiety have become essential components of an athlete's performance preparation program. Anxiety is a prevalent emotional state experienced by athletes at all levels, characterized by somatic components such as physiological arousal and cognitive elements such as worry and apprehension (Weinberg & Gould, 2015). In the context of sports, anxiety is often considered a natural response to situations in which an athlete's abilities are evaluated. Additionally, response time refers to the ability to respond swiftly and with control to a given stimulus (Reza *et al.*, 2018) [4]. According to Weinberg and Gould (2015), anxiety manifests through physiological symptoms like increased heart rate and sweating, behavioral symptoms such as nail-biting and fidgeting, and cognitive symptoms like negative thoughts and lack of focus. The spectrum of anxiety experiences in sports has been described by a variety of terms, including competitive state anxiety, competitive trait anxiety, somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, behavioral anxiety, performance anxiety, facilitative anxiety, debilitating anxiety, competition anxiety, and pre- and post-competition anxiety.

On the other hand, adventure sports, also known as extreme sports or outdoor adventure activities, encompass a wide range of leisure pursuits characterized by their inherent thrill, physical demands, and the element of risk or danger involved. These activities are known for providing participants with exhilarating, adrenaline-pumping experiences, often in natural environments. Examples of adventure sports include rock climbing, white-water rafting, skydiving, surfing, mountain biking, base jumping, canyoning, paragliding, skiing, snowboarding, and bungee jumping. Enthusiasts are often attracted to these activities by the adrenaline rush, the opportunity to connect with nature, and the sense of accomplishment they provide. However, due to the inherent risks involved, participants are encouraged to prioritize safety through proper training, the use of suitable equipment, and effective risk management.

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Many adventure sports organizations also emphasize outdoor safety and environmental stewardship to help preserve natural areas for future generations.

Despite the wealth of research on anxiety in traditional sports, adventure sports have received less attention in this context. Given the unique features and challenges of adventure sports, this research gap highlights the need to investigate and compare anxiety experiences within these activities (Hanin, 2007) [2]. Therefore, the primary aim of this article is to provide readers with an up-to-date understanding of the complexities of sports-related anxiety, with a focus on adventure sports. This essay will first establish a comprehensive definition and theoretical framework for understanding anxiety in sports. It will then explore anxiety in adventure sports, offering a comparative analysis across different types of adventure activities to provide insights into this largely under-researched aspect of sports psychology.

Methodology

Subject Selection

A total of 20 participants ($n = 10$ kayaking and $n = 10$ canoeing) were carefully selected from Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India, to meet the study's objectives. Great care was taken to ensure a diverse and representative sample. The participants were aged between 17 and 25 years, ensuring a relatively uniform age range within the group.

Procedure

To investigate sports anxiety, the SCAT (Sports Competition Anxiety Test) was used as the tool in the study. Participants responded to fifteen statements regarding trait anxiety in the questionnaire. The test measured the competitors' anxiety related to their specific sport competitions. There was no time limit for completing the questionnaire, and participants were provided with clear instructions.

Statistical Analysis

Initially, the Shapiro-Wilk test and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were used to verify the assumption of normality in the data. Since the assumption of normality was upheld, a parametric test was used to compare the groups. An independent t-test was conducted using SPSS Version 26.

Results

Table 1: General characteristics of the subjects

Game	n	Age (Mean \pm SD)	Height (mt)	Weight (kg)
kayaking	10	20 \pm 4.2	1.65 \pm 5.3	55.2 \pm 8.23
Canoeing	10	21 \pm 2.2	1.63 \pm 4.4	57.6 \pm 9.44

Table 1 summarizes the key traits of participants in kayaking and canoeing. The mean age of the kayaking group was 20 years, with a standard deviation of 4.2 years. Their average height was 1.65 meters (SD = 5.3 cm), and their average weight was 55.2 kg (SD = 8.23 kg). In comparison, the canoeing group had a slightly higher mean age of 21 years, with a standard deviation of 2.2 years. Their average height was 1.63 meters (SD = 4.4 cm), and their average weight was 57.6 kg (SD = 9.44 kg). These statistics provide insight into the demographic characteristics of participants in these two water sports

Table 2: Independent t-test comparing mean anxiety levels between kayaking and canoeing

Game	N	Mean	SD	Sig.
kayaking	10	21.53	3.14	0.08
Canoeing	10	21.73	3.15	

An independent samples t-test (Table 2) was conducted to compare anxiety levels between kayaking and canoeing participants. The results showed that there was no significant difference in anxiety levels between the kayaking group ($M = 21.53$, $SD = 3.14$) and the canoeing group ($M = 21.73$, $SD = 3.15$); $t(18)$, $p = .08$. These results suggest that the type of sport, kayaking or canoeing, does not significantly impact the mean anxiety levels of participants.

Discussion

The current study aimed to compare and examine anxiety levels among participants in canoeing and kayaking. The average anxiety levels for canoeing and kayaking were 21.73 ± 3.15 and 21.53 ± 3.14 , respectively. Although the mean anxiety score of the canoeing group was slightly higher, this difference was not statistically significant ($p > .05$). These results suggest no discernible difference in anxiety concerns between kayakers and canoeists.

It is worthwhile, however, to explore the significance of these findings in light of previous sports psychology research. The lack of a statistically significant difference supports the idea that the type of watercraft used may not significantly impact anxiety, at least in sporting contexts. Research on anxiety in water sports has often highlighted that individual variations, competition-related stressors, and athletes' perceptions of the event are more influential factors than the specific sport itself (Hanin, 2007) [2].

Furthermore, our results align with studies indicating that anxiety is a common experience for athletes across various sports. In competitive contexts, both trait and state anxiety are prevalent among athletes. Trait anxiety is a stable personal trait, while state anxiety is situational and transient (Mellalieu *et al.*, 2009) [3].

However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this research. The relatively small sample size and the unique demographics of the participants may limit the broader applicability of our findings. Future research could benefit from larger and more diverse samples. Additionally, anxiety in this study was assessed solely through self-report measures. Future research could combine psychological and physiological assessments to provide a more comprehensive understanding of anxiety in these sports.

Conclusion

Research enhances understanding of anxiety in water-based activities, specifically canoeing and kayaking. Although the mean anxiety scores between the groups differed slightly, the difference was not statistically significant. These findings suggest that similar anxiety management techniques could benefit athletes in both sports. Further research should explore additional factors influencing anxiety in water sports for a more comprehensive understanding of its impact on performance.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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