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Emotional intelligence among collegiate athletes: A comparative study of individual and team sports participants

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Abstract

Emotional Intelligence (EI) significantly influences athletes' behavior, interpersonal dynamics, and performance outcomes. This study investigates the differences in emotional intelligence between collegiate athletes engaged in individual and team sports at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Palakkad. A total of 120 athletes (56 from individual sports and 64 from team sports) completed the Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Dr. C.D. Agashe and Dr. R.D. Helode. Statistical analysis revealed no significant difference in overall EI scores between the two groups ($p = 0.855463$). Nonetheless, distinct patterns emerged: individual sport athletes demonstrated stronger self-awareness and emotional regulation, whereas team sport athletes excelled in empathy and interpersonal relations. These findings offer valuable implications for coaches and sports psychologists in designing sport-specific emotional skills training.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, team sports, individual sports, collegiate athletes, psychological skills

1. Introduction

Emotional Intelligence (EI) the capacity to perceive, comprehend, manage, and regulate emotions in oneself and others (Goleman, 1995) ^[1] has become increasingly relevant in sports psychology. For athletes, EI is linked to enhanced performance, effective stress management, resilience, and improved teamwork. It affects decision-making under pressure and the quality of interpersonal interactions, both during and beyond competition.

The psychological demands of individual and team sports differ significantly. Athletes in individual sports often rely on self-motivation and personal discipline, whereas those in team sports require communication, cooperation, and emotional attunement to others (Weinberg & Gould, 2018) ^[3]. This study seeks to explore how such sport-specific contexts influence the emotional intelligence of collegiate athletes in IIT Palakkad.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

The study was conducted at IIT Palakkad and included 120 collegiate athletes: 56 from individual sports (e.g., athletics, table tennis, badminton) and 64 from team sports (e.g., football, basketball, volleyball). Participants were 120 students aged between 18 and 25 years. Data was collected using the Sports Emotional Intelligence Test developed by Dr. C.D. Agashe and Dr. R.D. Helode (2008) ^[2]. The tool consists of 15 items representing key dimensions such as self-awareness, empathy, social skills, emotional regulation, motivation, emotional stability, and relationship management.

2.3 Procedure to obtain data

The questionnaire (Dr. C.D. Agashe and Dr. R.D. Helode, 2008) ^[2] was distributed online via Google Forms, available in both English and Hindi. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained. Coaches facilitated the form distribution to maximize athlete participation.

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2.3 Scoring procedure

The scoring procedure of the entire test is very simple. Each sports-situation stands with five alternative response categories, namely, (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e). The differential weightage scoring system is prescribed. For instance, for the best alternative, a score of 20, for the better alternative, a score of 15, for the good alternative, a score of 10, for the poor alternative, a score of 5 and for the poorest alternative, a score of 0 (zero) is prescribed on the basis of the verdict of the judges. Using this verdict as a base, the differential numerical scoring weightages are assigned to all the alternatives standing with all 15 sports-situations. The maximum possible sports emotional intelligence score on this test is 300 and the minimum possible score is Zero. Hence higher the score greater the sports emotional intelligence is the direction of the scoring. A scoring key is also available with the test booklet to facilitate the speed of scoring of this sports-emotional intelligence test. The scores given on all alternative responses of the 15 items are to be added to work out the total sports-emotional intelligence of the given individual.

3. Results

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of scores on sports emotional intelligence in a group of team game and individual game male players

Group	N	Mean	SD
Team game players	64	209.2969	39.51961
Individual game players	56	209.4643	54.19871

The mean EI score for team sport athletes was 209.29 (SD = 39.51), while that for individual sport athletes was 209.46 (SD = 54.19871.12). An independent t-test showed no statistically significant difference (p value = 0.85) in overall emotional intelligence between the two groups

However, item-level analysis revealed that individual sport athletes scored higher in self-awareness and emotional regulation, whereas team sport athletes showed higher scores in empathy, interpersonal relations, and social skills.

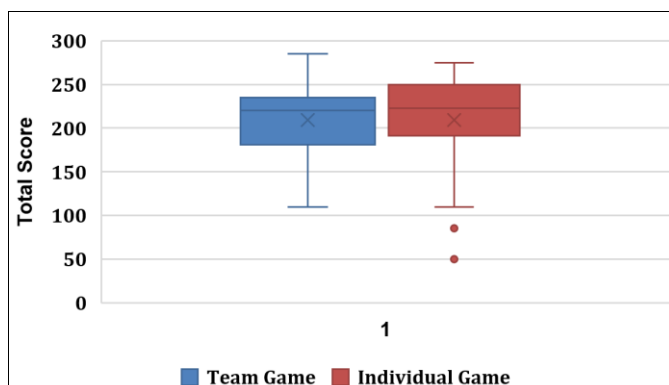


Fig 1: Comparison of total score between team game and individual game players

4. Discussion

Although no significant difference was found in total EI scores, the results highlight sport-specific emotional competencies. Individual sport athletes, often training and performing independently, may cultivate stronger emotional self-reliance and regulation skills. In contrast, team sport athletes benefit from social interaction and develop emotional attributes essential for collaboration and group cohesion as shown in the appendix Table. This is reflected in the score of

individual questions. The lack of difference can also be due to the fact that IIT Palakkad students are not professional athletes.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that while overall emotional intelligence levels do not differ significantly between athletes in individual and team sports, specific EI domains vary by sport type. Incorporating EI training into sports programs can enhance athlete performance, team dynamics, and well-being. Future research could further investigate the role of variables such as gender, competitive level, and cultural background in shaping emotional intelligence in sports contexts.

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