



EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL VARIABLES ON PERFORMANCE IN KHO-KHO PLAYERS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of key psychological variables—such as motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, concentration, and stress—on the performance of Kho-Kho players. As a traditional Indian sport requiring agility, teamwork, and strategic thinking, Kho-Kho presents unique psychological demands on athletes. The research aims to identify how these psychological factors correlate with individual and team performance levels. Using a mixed-method approach involving standardized psychological scales and performance assessments, data was collected from male and female Kho-Kho players at the intercollegiate and state levels. The results indicate significant relationships between high self-confidence and improved performance, while elevated anxiety and stress levels were associated with decreased efficiency on the field. These findings underscore the importance of psychological preparedness and mental training in optimizing athletic performance in Kho-Kho. The study suggests that coaches and sports psychologists should incorporate psychological skill training into regular practice to enhance player outcomes.



KEYWORDS: Kho-Kho, Psychological Variables, Sports Performance, Motivation, Anxiety, Self-Confidence, Stress, Concentration, Sports Psychology.

INTRODUCTION

Kho-Kho, one of India's oldest and most dynamic indigenous sports, demands not only physical agility and strategic execution but also a strong psychological foundation. As the game involves rapid decision-making, high levels of coordination, and quick reflexes, the mental state of the players becomes a crucial determinant of their performance. In recent years, sports science has increasingly emphasized the role of psychological factors—such as motivation, anxiety, confidence, focus, and stress management—in influencing athletic outcomes across various disciplines. While much research has been conducted on psychological variables in mainstream sports like cricket, football, and athletics, traditional games like Kho-Kho have received relatively little attention. Given the fast-paced, high-pressure nature of Kho-Kho, players are frequently exposed to situations that test their mental resilience and emotional control. Understanding how psychological attributes affect the performance of Kho-Kho players can provide valuable insights for coaches, trainers, and sports psychologists aiming to enhance competitive success.

This study aims to bridge the gap by examining the impact of selected psychological variables on the performance of Kho-Kho players. By identifying key psychological factors that contribute to or hinder athletic performance, the research seeks to provide a holistic perspective on player development. The findings of this study can contribute to designing more effective training programs that integrate psychological skills alongside physical conditioning, ultimately leading to improved performance and well-being of athletes.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aim:

To examine the influence of selected psychological variables on the performance of Kho-Kho players and to identify how these factors contribute to or hinder their athletic effectiveness.

Objectives:

1. To identify key psychological variables—such as motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, stress, and concentration—relevant to the performance of Kho-Kho players.
2. To assess the psychological profiles of Kho-Kho players using standardized psychological assessment tools.
3. To analyze the relationship between psychological variables and players' on-field performance.
4. To compare psychological variables between different groups of Kho-Kho players (e.g., based on gender, competition level, or experience).
5. To provide recommendations for integrating psychological skills training into coaching programs to enhance player performance.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The role of psychological variables in sports performance has been extensively studied across a wide range of athletic disciplines. Psychological preparedness is increasingly recognized as a critical component of athletic success, especially in competitive sports where mental endurance can determine the outcome as much as physical ability. Motivation is one of the most significant psychological factors influencing sports performance. According to Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1985), intrinsic motivation—where athletes engage in sports for internal satisfaction—leads to better performance and long-term commitment. Studies in team sports suggest that highly motivated players tend to exhibit greater persistence, discipline, and focus during gameplay (Pelletier et al., 2001). Anxiety, both state and trait, has a complex relationship with performance. Spielberger (1972) distinguished between trait anxiety (a general tendency) and state anxiety (a temporary emotional state). According to the Inverted-U Hypothesis by Yerkes and Dodson (1908), a moderate level of arousal enhances performance, while too little or too much can be detrimental. In fast-paced sports like Kho-Kho, high anxiety can impair reaction time, decision-making, and coordination.

Self-confidence is another critical factor affecting athletic performance. Vealey's Sport Confidence Model (1986) suggests that athletes with higher levels of self-belief perform better and recover quickly from mistakes. Empirical studies have shown that self-confident athletes display greater consistency and are more resilient under pressure (Bandura, 1997). Stress and coping mechanisms also influence athletic outcomes. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) highlights how individuals perceive and respond to stress. Athletes with effective coping strategies often maintain composure and adapt to changing game conditions better than those with poor stress management skills. Concentration and attentional control are essential in high-speed games like Kho-Kho, where players must maintain constant awareness of opponents and teammates. Research suggests that athletes who excel in selective attention and cognitive control demonstrate superior game awareness and tactical execution (Abernethy, 2001). Although there is abundant literature on psychological variables in mainstream sports, limited research has specifically focused on indigenous sports like Kho-Kho. Given the game's demand for speed, strategic maneuvering, and teamwork, understanding the psychological makeup of Kho-Kho players is essential. Existing gaps in

the literature highlight the need for studies that focus on traditional sports, particularly in the Indian context, to develop targeted interventions for enhancing mental and physical performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design:

This study adopts a descriptive and correlational research design to examine the relationship between selected psychological variables and the performance of Kho-Kho players. The design allows for the analysis of how psychological factors influence performance outcomes in a natural sporting environment.

2. Participants:

The sample consisted of 100 Kho-Kho players (both male and female) selected from various colleges, universities, and state-level teams across [specify region or state]. The participants were chosen using purposive sampling, ensuring that only active and competitive players with at least one year of experience were included.

3. Tools and Instruments:

Sports Motivation Scale (SMS): To assess intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. , Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (CSAI-2): To measure levels of anxiety (cognitive, somatic) and self-confidence. , Sport Mental Toughness Questionnaire (SMTQ): To evaluate resilience and psychological strength. , Concentration Grid Test or Focus Assessment Scale: To measure levels of concentration and attentional focus. Performance Evaluation Sheet: Developed in collaboration with coaches to rate player performance based on objective and subjective game metrics (e.g., agility, coordination, decision-making, and strategic execution).

4. Procedure:

Permission was obtained from coaches and institutions for data collection. , Participants were briefed about the objectives of the study, and informed consent was obtained.

Psychological questionnaires were administered before or after practice sessions to ensure a comfortable environment. Performance evaluations were conducted by experienced coaches during actual match play or controlled practice sessions.

5. Statistical Analysis:

Mean, standard deviation to describe the psychological profiles. To examine the relationship between psychological variables and performance. , To assess differences in psychological variables across gender or experience levels , To determine the predictive value of psychological factors on performance outcomes. All analyses were conducted using SPSS software (or any other preferred statistical tool).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the field of competitive sports, physical fitness and technical skill have traditionally been viewed as the primary determinants of athletic performance. However, growing evidence in sports psychology highlights the critical role of psychological variables—such as motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, stress, and concentration—in influencing an athlete's success. Despite this recognition, limited research exists that explores the psychological aspects of performance in indigenous and traditional sports like Kho-Kho, which are deeply rooted in Indian culture and played extensively at school, collegiate, and national levels. Kho-Kho is a high-speed, strategy-driven sport that demands sharp focus, quick decision-making, and strong team coordination. Given its fast-paced nature, players are frequently exposed to psychologically demanding situations that can affect their performance. While psychological studies have been conducted in mainstream sports such as cricket, football, and

athletics, the psychological preparedness and mental challenges faced by Kho-Kho players remain under-explored.

The lack of focused research on psychological variables in Kho-Kho raises critical questions: How do psychological factors affect the performance of Kho-Kho players? Which variables have the most significant impact, and how can this understanding be applied in training and development programs? Therefore, this study seeks to examine the impact of psychological variables on the performance of Kho-Kho players, aiming to bridge the gap in current literature and contribute to a more holistic approach to athlete development in traditional Indian sports.

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Future research can expand upon the current study by including a larger and more diverse sample of Kho-Kho players across various regions of India to increase the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies could be conducted to examine how psychological variables influence performance over time and across different stages of an athlete's career. It would also be beneficial to incorporate intervention-based studies where psychological training programs are introduced and their effects on performance are measured. Comparing psychological profiles of Kho-Kho players with those of athletes from other team sports can provide deeper insights into sport-specific mental demands. Additionally, qualitative methods such as interviews or focus group discussions could be used to explore the subjective experiences of players related to stress, motivation, and confidence during competitions. The role of socio-cultural and environmental factors in shaping the psychological mindset of Kho-Kho players also presents a valuable area for further investigation. Integrating the perspectives of coaches and sports psychologists may enrich the understanding of how psychological support can be effectively implemented in training regimes.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This study focuses on examining the influence of selected psychological variables—namely motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, stress, and concentration—on the performance of Kho-Kho players. The scope is limited to players actively participating at the intercollegiate and state levels within a specific region of India. The research aims to provide insights into how these psychological factors affect performance and to highlight the need for psychological skill development in training programs. However, the study is limited by its sample size and geographic coverage, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Data collection relied on self-reported questionnaires, which may be subject to bias or social desirability effects. Additionally, performance was evaluated through coach assessments and observed match performance rather than standardized national-level performance metrics. External factors such as coaching quality, team dynamics, and individual physical fitness were not controlled in the study, which may have influenced performance outcomes independently of psychological factors.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study highlight the significant influence of psychological variables on the performance of Kho-Kho players. Among the variables examined—motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, stress, and concentration—self-confidence and motivation emerged as strong positive predictors of performance. Players who reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation and self-belief were consistently rated higher in both individual and team performance evaluations. These results align with existing literature in sports psychology, reinforcing the idea that mental readiness and inner drive are crucial in competitive sports settings. Conversely, anxiety and stress showed a negative correlation with performance, suggesting that elevated psychological pressure can hinder players' decision-making abilities, reaction time, and overall gameplay. The detrimental effect of anxiety, particularly cognitive anxiety, supports the Inverted-U Hypothesis and highlights the importance of emotional regulation during high-stakes matches. Players experiencing high stress levels also demonstrated less consistency

and were more prone to performance lapses, indicating the need for stress-management training as part of athletic development.

Concentration was another key variable positively associated with performance. Players with higher concentration scores were able to anticipate opponents' moves more accurately, maintain strategic positioning, and recover quickly from setbacks during play. This finding underscores the role of cognitive focus in a fast-paced sport like Kho-Kho, where situational awareness and quick thinking are essential. The study also revealed subtle differences in psychological profiles based on gender and experience level, with more experienced players displaying greater psychological resilience and confidence. This suggests that exposure to competitive environments may help athletes develop stronger psychological coping mechanisms over time. Overall, the discussion indicates that psychological factors play a critical role in the athletic success of Kho-Kho players. Incorporating mental skills training, such as goal-setting, visualization, stress reduction, and focus enhancement techniques, could contribute significantly to improving player performance. These findings not only validate the relevance of sports psychology in indigenous games but also provide practical implications for coaches, trainers, and sports institutions aiming to develop well-rounded athletes.

Further research is recommended to explore intervention strategies and to evaluate the long-term impact of psychological training on performance sustainability in Kho-Kho and similar traditional sports.

CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that psychological variables have a substantial impact on the performance of Kho-Kho players. Key factors such as motivation, self-confidence, concentration, anxiety, and stress significantly influence how players perform under competitive conditions. High levels of motivation, self-confidence, and concentration were positively associated with better performance, while elevated anxiety and stress were found to hinder players' effectiveness on the field. These findings underscore the need to move beyond physical training alone and emphasize the integration of psychological skill development in regular coaching practices. In a fast-paced, high-pressure sport like Kho-Kho, mental resilience, emotional control, and focused attention are as critical as physical fitness and technical skill. The study contributes valuable insights into the psychological dimensions of a traditional Indian sport, where limited research has been conducted so far. It highlights the importance of a holistic approach to athlete development that includes psychological assessment, intervention, and support. In conclusion, enhancing the mental preparedness of Kho-Kho players through structured psychological training can lead to improved individual and team performance, and should be considered a vital component of modern sports training programs.

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