Self-Esteem, Psychological Factors and Sports Participation: A Comparative Study Among Basketball Players and Non-Active Individuals

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between self-esteem, psychological factors, and sports participation among national team basketball players, national league players, and non-active individuals. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates multiple psychological constructs, including self-efficacy, mental toughness, and cognitive reappraisal, to provide a comprehensive assessment of self-esteem across different levels of sports engagement. Findings reveal that national team players exhibit significantly higher self-esteem compared to national league players and non-active individuals, with self-efficacy emerging as a key mediating factor. Regression analysis confirms that sports participation significantly predicts self-esteem, highlighting the psychological benefits of competitive sports. The study addresses a critical gap in the literature by comparing diverse groups and integrating multiple psychological dimensions, offering valuable insights for sports psychologists, coaches, and policymakers.

Keywords: self-esteem, psychological factors, sports participation, self-efficacy, basketball

1. INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is a fundamental component of psychological well-being, influencing motivation, resilience, and overall mental health. In sports psychology, self-esteem is closely linked to performance, self-efficacy, and emotional regulation. Competitive athletes, particularly those engaged in basketball at different levels, experience various psychological demands that shape their self-perception. Conversely, non-active individuals (NAI) develop self-esteem through alternative social, academic, or professional experiences. This study assessed self-esteem levels among national team basketball players, national league basketball players, and non-active individuals, while also incorporating additional psychological factors such as self-efficacy, and emotional regulation. Utilizing the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) alongside validated psychological scales, the research explored the impact of competitive sports participation on self-esteem and associated mental attributes. The expanded scope of analysis provided a deeper understanding of the psychological benefits and challenges tied to athletic participation. While existing studies have explored self-esteem in general populations and elite athletes separately, there is limited comparative research on different competitive levels (national team vs. national league players) and non-active individuals. Additionally, most studies focus only on self-esteem, without integrating other psychological factors like self-efficacy, and emotional regulation, which are critical to understanding athlete psychology holistically.

This study seeks to fill this gap by offering a multi-dimensional psychological assessment across distinct groups.

2. Literature review

The study was grounded in several theoretical frameworks that provided a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between self-esteem and sports participation. Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Theory (1965) conceptualized self-esteem as an individual's overall sense of self-worth and self-acceptance, with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale serving as a widely used tool for standardized assessment. Findings confirmed that competitive athletes, particularly those at the national team level, tend to exhibit higher self-esteem compared to non-active individuals, a trend further explained by Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1977). According to this theory, self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to achieve goals, significantly influences motivation, resilience, and performance. The study demonstrated that national team players possessed notably higher self-efficacy levels, which correlated positively with self-esteem, reinforcing the notion that athletes who believe in their capabilities tend to display greater confidence and psychological stability. Beyond individual psychological constructs, Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) provided additional context for understanding how competitive sports impact self-esteem. This theory suggests that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their abilities and achievements to those of others.

2.1 Empirical evidences

Research has consistently shown that athletes, particularly those competing at elite levels, tend to report higher self-esteem than non-athletes, a phenomenon attributed to the structured environment of sports that fosters frequent feedback, goal-setting opportunities, and strong social support (Taylor & Wilson, 2005). In contrast, individuals who do not engage in regular physical activity often experience lower self-esteem, possibly due to a lack of achievement-oriented experiences and social validation, which are fundamental to the development of positive self-perception (Fox, 2000). While elite athletes generally exhibit elevated self-esteem, variations may exist within athletic populations depending on the level of competition. National team players, for instance, may demonstrate higher self-esteem compared to league players, as they benefit from greater recognition, competitive success, and validation of their skills on a broader stage (Smith et al., 2018).

3. Methods

3.1 Conceptual framework

This study examined the level of sports participation as the independent variable, distinguishing between national team players, national league players, and non-active individuals. The dependent variables included self-esteem and self-efficacy. Findings indicated that competitive athletes, particularly those at the national team level, consistently outperformed non-active individuals across all psychological measures. Additional moderating variables such as age, gender, and years of experience also played a role, with older and more experienced athletes displaying higher self-esteem and psychological resilience.

3.2 Hypotheses

1. National team players may have the highest self-esteem due to their elite status and achievements.
2. National league players may show moderate to high self-esteem, influenced by their competitive experience.

3. Non-active individuals may have lower self-esteem, especially regarding physical competence and self-worth related to sports.

3.3 Research design and data Analysis

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining structured questionnaires with semi-structured interviews to obtain both quantitative and qualitative insights. The sample consisted of 210 individuals, divided equally among national team basketball players, national league players, and non-active individuals. Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 24, with descriptive statistics summarizing demographic information and inferential statistics identifying significant relationships between variables.

Participants

The sample included 210 participants, divided into three groups: 70 national team players (NTP), 70 national league players (NLP), and 70 non-active individuals (NAI). The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula, ensuring a 95% confidence level.

3.4 Data collection techniques, tools and analysis methods

The techniques used to collect the data are a structured questionnaires for quantitative measurement and a semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth qualitative insights. Furthermore, several tools have been used including the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), a 10-item scale measuring global self-esteem, integrates seamlessly with the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE), which assesses belief in achieving goals through its 10-item structure. Frequencies and percentages were employed to summarize demographic and categorical data, while mean scores and standard deviation provided a basis for comparing psychological scores across groups. In terms of inferential statistics, Pearson correlation was utilized to examine relationships between self-esteem and psychological factors such as self-efficacy, mental toughness, and emotional regulation. Additionally, one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare self-esteem differences among the three groups, and regression analysis was used to determine whether sports participation significantly predicts self-esteem, offering a comprehensive statistical approach.

3.4.1 Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) – adapted version for sports context

Self-Esteem Statements

1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure (Reverse Scored).
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of (Reverse Scored).
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself (Reverse Scored).
9. I certainly feel useless at times. (Reverse Scored).
10. At times I think I am no good at all (Reverse Scored).

Participants respond to each statement using the following scale: 4 = Strongly Agree; 3 = Agree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree

Scoring and Interpretation

1. Total Score Range: 10 (low self-esteem) to 40 (high self-esteem).
2. Reverse-scored items (3, 5, 8, 9, 10) are recoded before calculating the total score.
3. Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem.

4. Results and analyze

Pearson correlation analysis revealed strong positive relationships between self-esteem and self-efficacy ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$), mental toughness ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$), and cognitive reappraisal ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$). One-way ANOVA confirmed significant differences in self-esteem across the three groups ($F(2, 87) = 15.34$, $p < 0.001$), with post-hoc analyses showing that national team players ($M = 4.5$) had significantly higher self-esteem than national league players ($M = 3.8$) and non-active individuals ($M = 2.9$). Regression analysis demonstrated that sports participation significantly predicted self-esteem ($\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.46$), with self-efficacy acting as a key mediating factor.

Table 1. Post-hoc ANOVA results: Self-Esteem across groups

Group	Mean (M)	Comparison	p-value
National Team Players	4.5	Highest self-esteem	$p < 0.001$
National League Players	3.8	Moderate self-esteem	$p < 0.001$
Non-Active Individuals	2.9	Lowest self-esteem	$p < 0.001$

Table 2. Pearson Correlation: relationships with Self-Esteem

Psychological Factor	Correlation (r)	p-value
Self-Efficacy	0.72	$p < 0.01$
Cognitive Reappraisal	0.58	$p < 0.01$

Table 3. Regression analysis: sports participation predicting Self-Esteem

Predictor	β (Beta)	p-value	R² (Explained Variance)
Sports Participation	0.68	$p < 0.001$	0.46

Table 4. One-Way ANOVA: Group Differences in Self-Esteem

Test Statistic	Value	p-value
F-statistic	15.34	$p < 0.001$

The tables provides a detailed overview of the statistical findings related to self-esteem, self-efficacy, mental toughness, cognitive reappraisal, and sports participation. This reinforces the earlier findings and underscores the impact of sports participation on self-esteem. Together, these results provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing self-esteem and the role of sports in enhancing psychological well-being. The findings of this study revealed significant differences in self-esteem across the three groups. National team basketball players exhibited the highest self-esteem levels, followed closely by national league players. Non-active individuals reported significantly lower self-esteem, suggesting that engagement in competitive sports contributes positively to an individual's self-worth. Moreover, self-efficacy emerged as a strong predictor of self-esteem among athletes, reinforcing Bandura's assertion that belief in one's ability to succeed enhances confidence and performance.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that national team players, who regularly engage in high-performance environments, exhibit higher self-esteem due to their ability to compete at an elite level. This aligns with existing research, such as the work of Weiss and Ferrer-Caja (2002), who found that elite athletes often develop stronger self-esteem through mastery experiences, social recognition, and the competitive nature of sports. Similarly, Marsh and Perry (2005) demonstrated that participation in structured, achievement-oriented activities like sports positively influences self-esteem by providing opportunities for skill development and social comparison. In contrast, non-active individuals in this study reported significantly lower self-esteem scores, which is consistent with findings from Fox (2000), who highlighted that individuals without structured opportunities for achievement or social comparison often struggle to build self-worth. This underscores the importance of engagement in activities that foster a sense of accomplishment and belonging, as noted in Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which emphasizes the role of mastery experiences in shaping self-perception.

A key contribution of this study is its integration of multiple psychological constructs, such as self-efficacy, mental toughness, and cognitive reappraisal, to examine self-esteem in sports. This approach advances beyond earlier studies, such as those by Sonstroem and Morgan (1989), which often considered self-esteem in isolation. By incorporating self-efficacy as a mediating factor, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying the relationship between sports participation and self-esteem. This aligns with Bandura's (1997) assertion that self-efficacy—belief in one's ability to succeed—plays a critical role in enhancing confidence and performance, thereby boosting self-esteem. Furthermore, this study addresses a significant research gap by directly comparing self-esteem across different competitive levels (national team players, national league players, and non-active individuals). While earlier studies, such as those by Adie et al. (2008), focused on either general populations or elite athletes separately, this study offers a nuanced perspective by examining the continuum of sports participation.

The findings suggest that the level of engagement in sports—whether elite, recreational, or non-active—significantly influences self-esteem, with higher levels of participation correlating with greater self-worth. This study not only corroborates existing research on the positive impact of sports participation on self-esteem but also expands the field by integrating multiple psychological constructs and comparing diverse groups. Future research could build on these findings by exploring longitudinal effects of sports participation on self-esteem and examining additional mediating factors, such as social support and motivation.

6. Conclusion

The results of this study reinforce the crucial role of competitive sports in fostering psychological well-being. National team basketball players exhibited the highest self-esteem and self-efficacy, highlighting the positive impact of elite-level sports participation on mental resilience. Emotional regulation strategies also varied significantly, with competitive athletes favoring adaptive strategies such as cognitive reappraisal. The findings provide valuable insights for sports psychologists, coaches, and policymakers aiming to enhance athlete development programs.

Future research should explore longitudinal effects of sports participation on self-esteem and related psychological factors, as well as investigate potential interventions to support athletes transitioning out of competitive sports. By integrating psychological support mechanisms within sports organizations,

stakeholders can help athletes maintain optimal mental well-being throughout their careers and beyond.

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