

THE INFLUENCE OF SPORT PSYCHOLOGY INTERVENTIONS ON PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

Abhyuudai Singh

Amity International School Noida

DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2024.v09i02.013 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2024.v09i02.013>

Received: 18 Feb. 2024 / Accepted: 28 Feb. 2024 / Published: 4 March 2024

ABSTRACT

The paper analyzed the extent to which psychological intervention impacted the results of sportspersons. Sportspersons are often concerned about the outcomes of sporting events. The level of stress and anxiety tend to reach extremely high levels which in the long run may be detrimental to the final result. Realization of this and timely intervention has definitely resulted in phenomenal success irrespective of the sport played. Various case studies were researched and analyzed both in India and rest of the world in sports such as football tennis golf to validate the above analysis.

Keywords: Sports Psychology, Performance Outcomes, Psychological Interventions, Athletes, Stress, Anxiety.

Research Question: The research would attempt to understand the impact of Psychology on sports individuals. A comparison would be attempted between sports people who have adopted psychological methods before and after their use. What is the type of psychological innovations that are beneficial for sports?

Are they the same for men and women? Do they differ depending on the sport in question? Is it a time-consuming intervention? Can it suffice on its own to improve performance? These and other such questions are explored this paper.

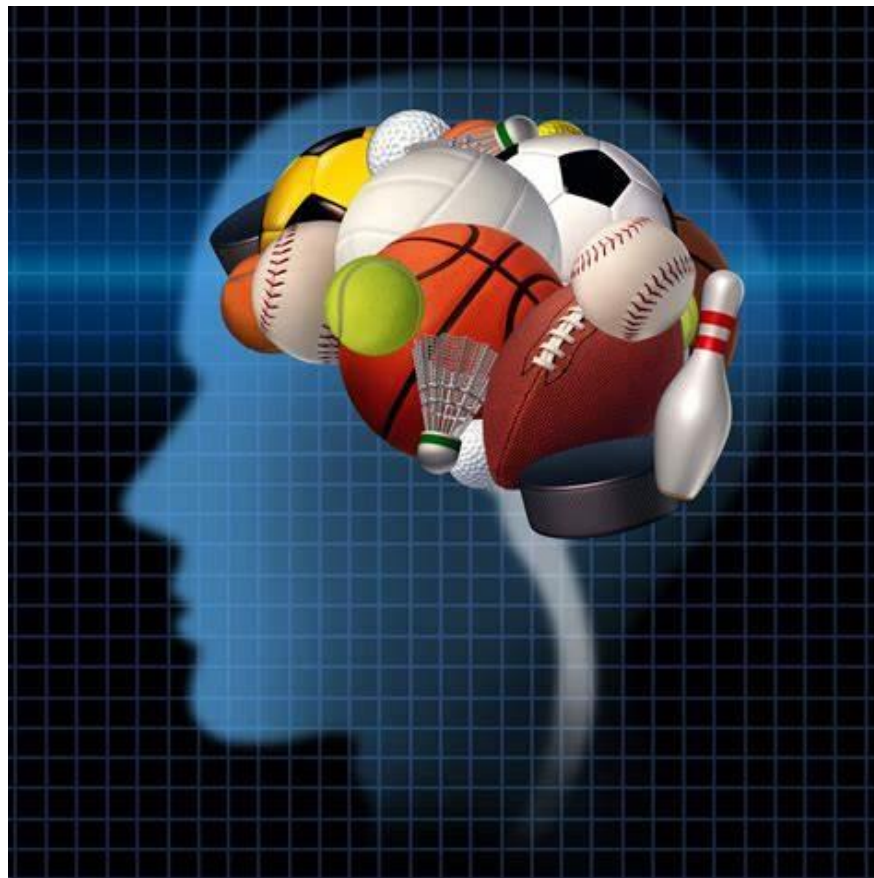
1. Introduction

Coleman Griffith is widely known as the father of sport psychology in the United States. He conducted a series of studies with the Chicago Cubs baseball team and the University of Illinois. But Sport Psychology as an academic pursuit is nearly two centuries old. Since inception, the aim has been to understand how psychological techniques can improve athletic performance. Amongst the most important avenues is 'sport psychology', which helps in better understanding

as well as improvement in sport performance. Verifying its global performance, requires one to open any newspaper's sports section, browsing through the internet, or even counting the number of sports channels that are dedicated to sports events. It becomes imperative to continuously raise the bar of sportspersons, and this is where sports psychology enters.

Given the importance of sports, there has simultaneously been a history of sports psychology and research since the 1830's, it picked up pace in the later part of the 19th century. Early pioneers, who shaped sport psychology, include 'Wundt-the father of experimental psychology'.

Figure 1: Image of the need of Sports Psychologists



Source: neuro-psychology practice.com

There were a number of laboratories that were established in the early 20th century in Berlin, Russia, and the USA. It is from here that the separate branch of 'physical education' became a part of various academic curricula. Along with this, there was a global growth of a large number of specialist publications which were launched. It has been identified that 1415 publications about goal setting and sport since 1985; 5303 publications on confidence and sport since 1961,

3421 publications on anxiety and sport since 1980.(PMC PubMed Central, Sport Psychology and Performance meta-analyses; 2022).

In the pursuit of defining the term ‘sports psychologist’, there were two different areas that had to be amalgamated: one set were of sports psychologists that emerged were Clinical sport psychologists who are primarily trained in applied areas of psychology such as abnormal, clinical, counseling, and personality psychology and are thus licensed psychologists. These psychologists tend to be less trained in *sports science*. The other aspect is psychologists who are Educational Sport Psychologists who are normally not licensed psychologist. Their training is in exercise and sport science, physical education, kinesiology, and psychology of human movement, with special reference to sport. Such researchers claim to be regarded as ‘mental coaches.’

For quite a while there was a conflict between the two groups, primarily based on which group is better trained to provide the required services that enhance sport performance. The target people are normally elite sportspersons, and professional athletes, who most of the time do not feel the need for these services, and at times seek the help of individuals who are not trained in this area.

2. Definition

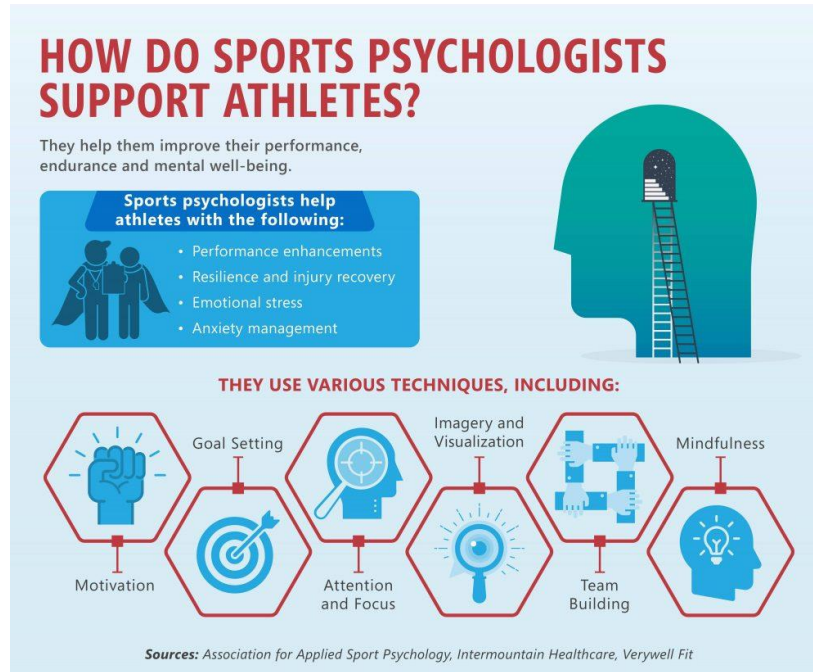
‘Sport’ comes from the Old French *disport* which means ‘leisure’. American English uses this term to refer to a general type of recreational activity. The oldest definition of sport in English (1300) is of anything humans find amusing or entertaining (Harper, Douglas, 2008).

The word psychology means, “The study of the soul”. Psychology is the study of the mind, occurring partly via the study of behavior. Grounded in scientific method, psychology has the immediate goal of understanding individuals and groups by both establishing general principles and researching specific cases.

Sport and exercise psychology is concerned with the psychological factors that influence sports performance and exercise behavior. There are various definitions’ that exist, but there is no one comprehensive and internationally accepted one. The European Federation of Sport Psychology(FEPSAC) defined the term as “that which is concerned with the psychological foundations, processes, and consequences of the psychological regulation of sport-related activities of one or several persons acting as the subject of the activity”,(Sport Psychology, Overview; Y.Hanin, N Stambulova). Sport psychology attempts to improve athletic performance, helping athletes to concentrate better, and deal effectively with competitive stress.

The word ‘sport’ is used as a wider term that includes different kinds of sport, exercise, and active pursuit.

Figure 2: Importance of Sports Psychology



Source: Association for Applied Sport Psychology Intermountain Healthcare

There are two major aspects to this concept;

- It is a part of psychology
- Its knowledge base is related to sport sciences that are focused on understanding human activity.

The three important factors are thus the person, the environment, and the key aspects of the sporting activity.

Sport psychology examines the short as well as the long term effects of psychological factors on athletic performance as well as the active involvement in sport. The primary aim is to help the athlete to develop their full potential.

The three main aspects are: athletic excellence, performance-related subjective experiences as well as individual resources (these come in the domain of psychological strengths). Important areas of athletic performance are examined from short term aspects which involve the readiness for competition as well as excellence in performance, while the long term consists of consistency at a high level of excellence, and career development.

2.1 Eras in the History of Sport Psychology

With the advent of Industrialisation, the leisure time available to the citizens of developed and developing countries had increased, leading to a larger amount of time being devoted to attend and follow sports. The introduction and the widespread use of the internet have further increased global communication and the interest in sports.

The history of sport psychology falls into six Eras:

- Era 1: The Early years (1895-1920): The first documented pioneer in the field of sport psychology investigated the effect of social facilitation on athletes. Dr Triplett's study in the late 1800 supported his hypothesis 'that cyclists often performed better when riding in pairs or groups than when riding alone.
- Era 2: The Griffith Era (1921-1938) He was the first Professor of educational psychology to perform comprehensive research and applied sport psychology work in the USA. He worked in a laboratory that was set up by Huff (the chairman of the Department of Physical Welfare. He studied the demands of athletic competition, as well as the benefits and downside of 'pep talks'.
- Era 3: Preparation for the Future (1939-1965): This period consisted of the development of the scientific aspect of the sport psychology field. Given the free exchange of knowledge in Europe led to the flourishing of sports psychology in Europe.
- Era 4: The Establishment of Academic Sport Psychology (1966-1977): This time period saw physical education become an academic discipline and sport psychology became a separate component of physical education. This entailed how psychological factors such as personality, self-esteem, and anxiety influence motor skill performance.
- Era 5: Multidisciplinary Science and Practice in Sport and Exercise Psychology (1978-2000): This era was one of major growth and development in sport psychology, basically due to the on-going acceptance and respect of the general public towards this area of study. This was the era when a separate line was drawn separating sport psychology from other psychologically related exercise and sport science specialisations. Rules and regulations were introduced on those that could practice sports psychology
- Era 6: Contemporary Sport and Exercise Psychology (2000- till present): Sport and exercise psychologists have begun providing information in the ways that psychological well-being and vigorous physical activity are related. Monitoring brain activity during exercise has aided in this research. Sports psychologists are beginning to consider that

exercise is therapeutic to healthy mental adjustment. They have realised that physical exercise does contribute to the psychological well-being of even non-athletes. There are a large number who could benefit from sports psychologists: athletes who are trying to improve performance, injured athletes who are looking for motivation, individuals looking to overcome the pressure of competition, and young children involved in youth sports as well as their parents. A special focus is on the 'assessment of athletes'. This is required for selection, team composition, as well as on the professional guidance and counselling of athletes.

3. Advent of Sports Psychology in India

This branch of psychology has very recently emerged in India. Research has concluded that the use of psychological tools and techniques have led to heightened efficiency in one's performance. Until the 1960's there is scarce application of science to the area of sports in India. The first major development of the Indian sports science movement began with the formation of the Indian Association of Sports Medicine (IASM)

It is the establishment of the Faculty of Sports Science under the Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports in 1983, which paved the way for training sportspersons in a scientific way.

After the 1982 Asian Games that were held in New Delhi, that the Government of India established a separate ministry for sports. There has been a substantial increase in budget that has been allocated towards sports science and sports psychology.

This area can further be divided into four different categories:

- Personality and athletes
- Anxiety
- Intelligence and creativity
- Other aspects and variables

It is a well-established fact psychology plays an extremely important role in enhancing the performance of an athlete. Despite the recognition of the importance of psychological aspects for an athlete's performance, many fail to accept its importance. The so-called 'image' of an Indian sportsperson seems to have over-riding importance. This is linked with the negative connotation of psychology; many individuals and athletes think going to a psychologist means there is a problem. In recent years there is a considerable decline in this so called 'stigma', it is still prevalent.

The widespread use of this science in enhancing the performance of foreign athletes has led athletes as well as coaches to recognize the importance of mental training as an essential component in the international sports arena.

Figure 3: Areas in which Sports Psychology can help.



Source: madaboutsports

The accolades received by the Indian cricket and hockey teams have hastened the acceptance of sports psychology as an avenue to increase an athlete's performance.

The psychology of sports focuses on stress and how to cope with it. Stress has been seen as a major factor in the failure of athletes to effectively and completely utilize their skills in varied performances.

3.1 Importance of how Sport Psychology benefits athletes

- Relaxation skills, e.g. progressive relaxation, slow controlled and deep abdominal breathing and autogenic training.
- A mastery of all the different attention type of styles and concentration.
- Kinesthetic and visual imagery
- Self-talk
- Development of pre-computation mental routines that they should follow prior to their game.

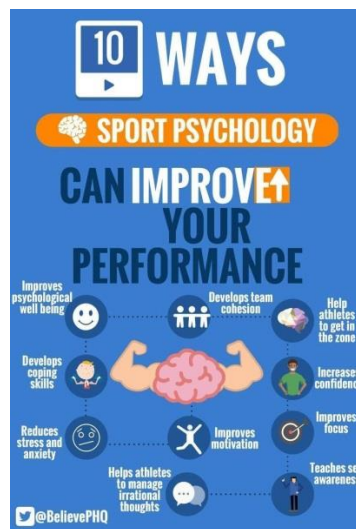
- Addresses emotional responses like frustration, isolation, and disturbances.

4. Necessity of Sports Psychologists in the Field of Sports

The role of a sports psychologist gained importance when star batsmen like Virat Kohli opened up about pressures faced by athletes. He has very often said” I have experienced times when I am surrounded by people but still feel alone. Everyone can relate with this. So take time for yourself to reconnect with your inner self”. Besides him, other international players in the field of sports such as Ben Stokes, Michael Phelps, Naomi Osaka, Simone Biles to name a few, who have stated how anxiety and depression affected their form in the respective games and matches that they participated in. It has been researched that the pressure of winning and the pressure caused by the expectation of the audience take a toll on the ‘psychological health’, of the players. At the initial levels i.e., at school, athletes are guided by their coaches, but at the national and international level, there is an urgent need for a full team to look after the physical fitness, health, diet, and performance of players. In fact, there is a need for a sports analyst who observes and analyses the form of a player.

In India, the audience idolizes a sports player if he/she wins, and condemns them if they fail to achieve their mark. In such situations, it is extremely important that the Sports Ministry and various sports associations to make quick decisions and come up with initiatives that enable players to overcome the barriers caused by mental health issues.

Figure 4: Sports psychology used to improve one’s performance



Source:griffindesnhbaird.blogspot.com

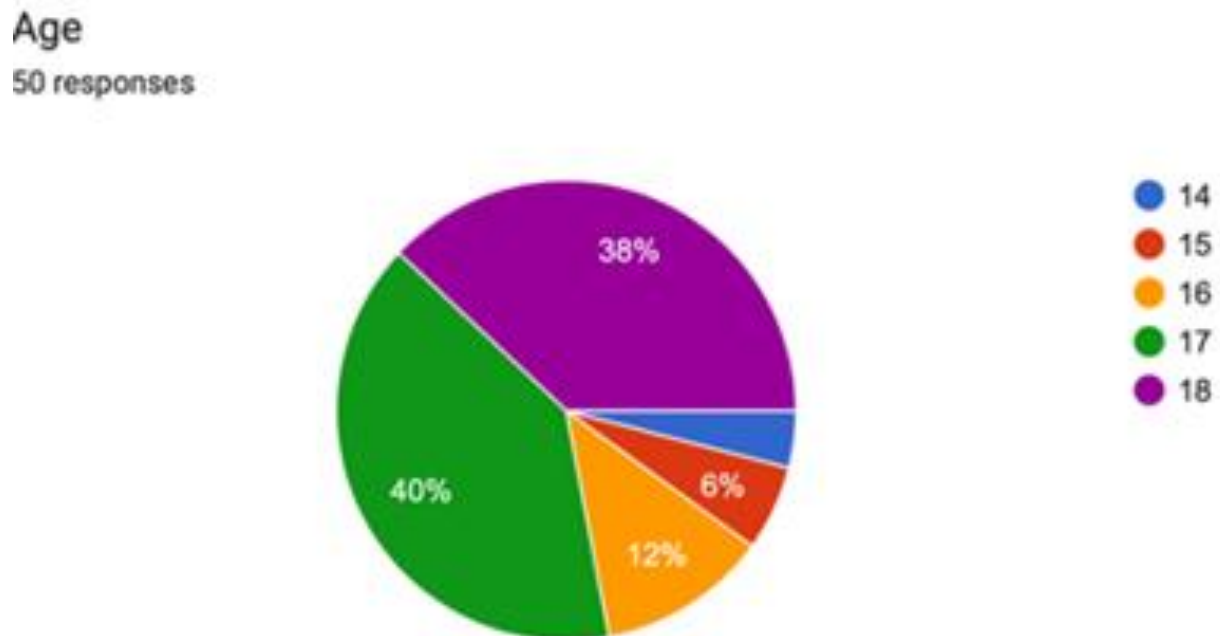
4.1 Sports psychologists in the Indian Premier League

Cricket has evolved significantly, impacting various spheres, including the utilization of sports psychologists. The introduction of the IPL (Indian Premier League) has significantly increased pressure on the players, who must not only perform, but excel to advance their career. They need to cope with the pressures of travelling over the 45-60 day window that the tournament is played. It was realised that to cope with the stress, there had to be a sports psychologist that had to be present to help the players reach their maximum potential at all times. The presence of sports psychologists proved extremely beneficial for all teams. The result being that the stigma the word 'psychology', carries with it has been reduced to a large extent. It has become more acceptable, carrying the promise of definite improvement. This concept has been adopted by most national and international Indian teams that are preparing for the world arena.

5. Results and Analysis of Survey conducted on school going children: their expectations from sports as well as whether a sports psychologist can help improve their standing:

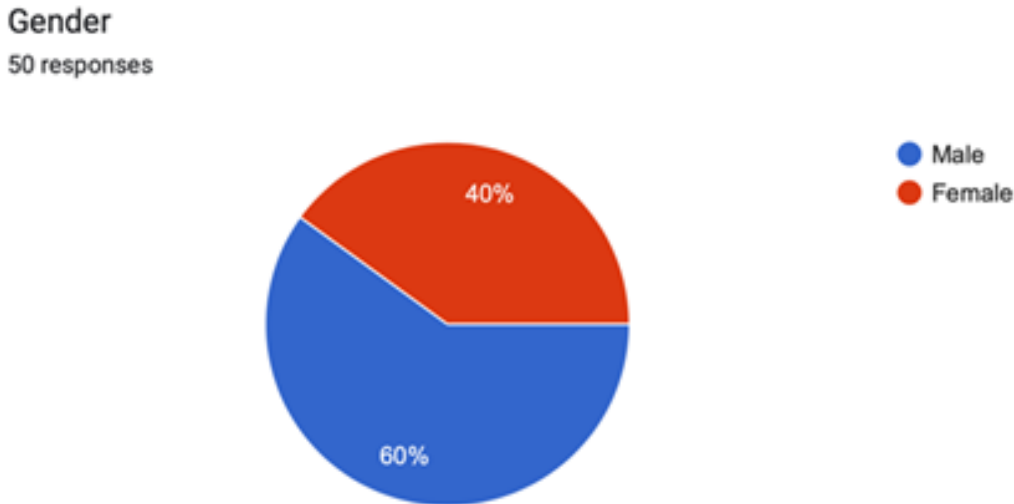
The age group of the respondents were majorly 17-18 years

Figure 5: Age group



Source: Authors Own

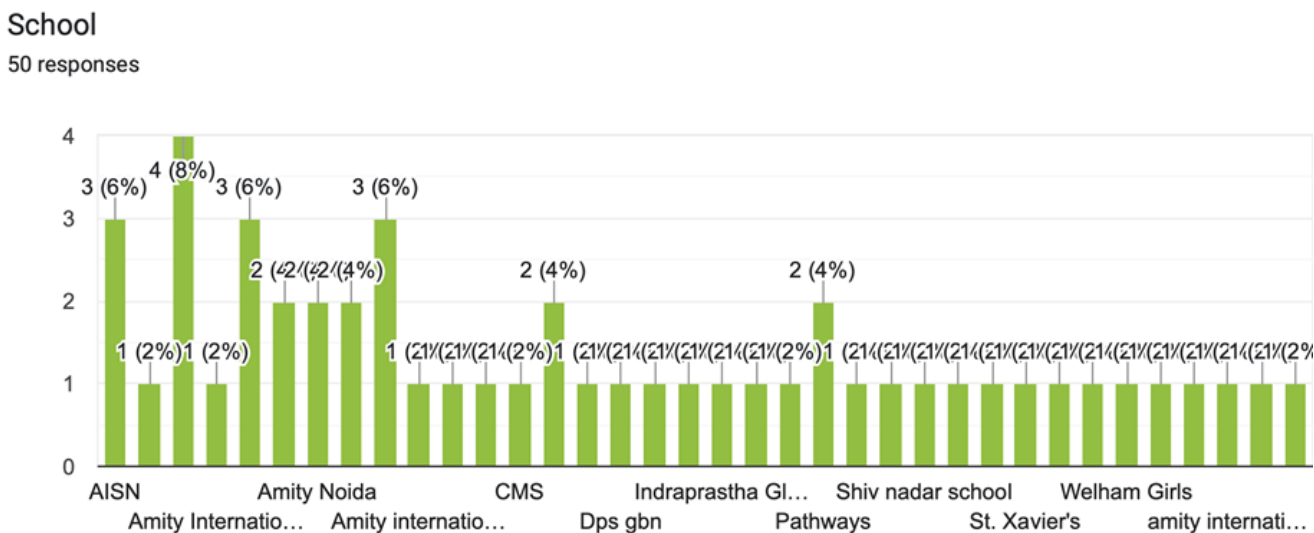
Figure 6: Gender Composition



Source: Own Source

The gender response among the respondents was more or less 50-50.

Figure 7: Schools across which the sample was conducted

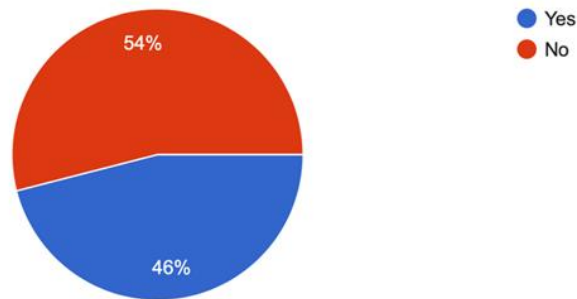


Source: Own Source

The schools that were considered were among the best in the country.

Figure 9: Are Respondents scared about the result of a sports event.

Are you scared about the result of a sports event?
50 responses

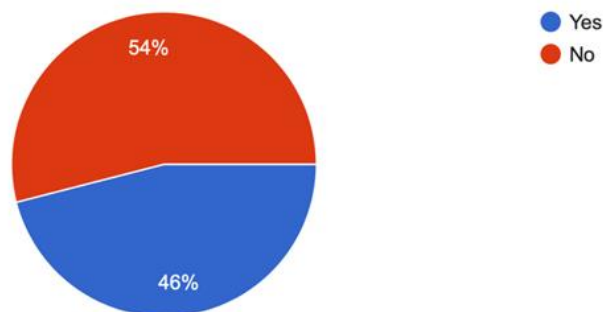


Source: Own Source

The results indicated that by and large the respondents had faith in their own capability, and were not bothered about the results of sports events.

Figure 10: Analysis of Pressure from various sources

Is there pressure on you to perform from your teachers, coaches, peers, parents etc.?
50 responses

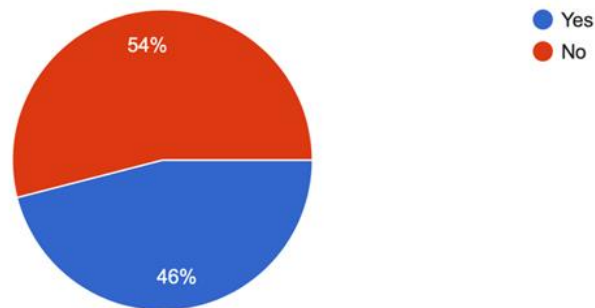


Source: Own source

Majority of the respondents said they were under pressure from various sources to perform well; but it is essential to note that the percentage numbers in the affirmative were very small.

Figure 11: Did the respondents continue with the sport?

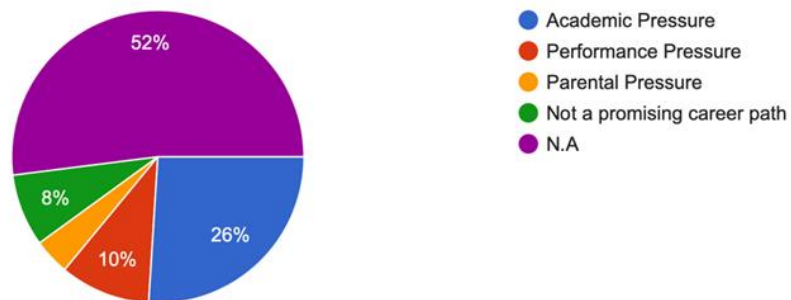
Did you continue with the sport?
50 responses



Source: Own source

Most of the children decided to continue with the sport in spite of the outcome of the result.

If no, what was the reason?
50 responses

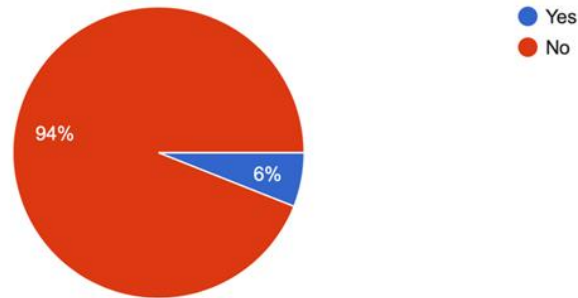


Source: Own Source

The main reason that sports were given up by the children in the survey conducted was 'Academic Pressure'. Only 19% said it was due to parental pressure.

Figure 13: Taking Psychological help

Did you resort to any psychological help to overcome the pressure?
50 responses

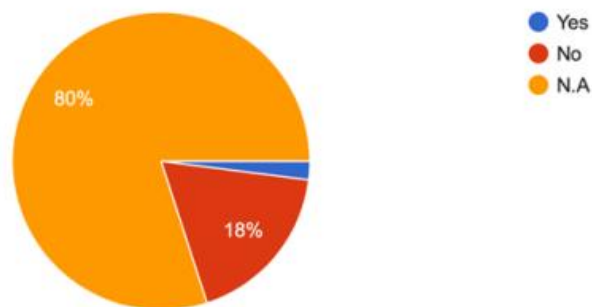


Source: Own source

The respondents were quite frank and open about the fact that they took psychological help when and if required. The taboo attached to 'Psychological help', seems to be on the way out.

Figure 14: Main supporters that offered Psychological help were Parents and the School

Was this help suggested by school or parents that led you to a sports psychologist?
50 responses

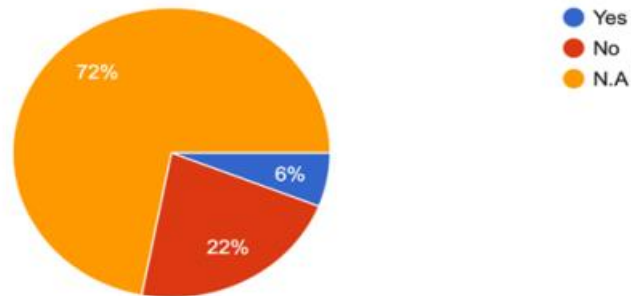


Source: Own Source

This response clearly indicated that responsible adults and not peers were involved in suggesting the right source for psychological help.

Figure 15: Did they go to a sports Psychologist.

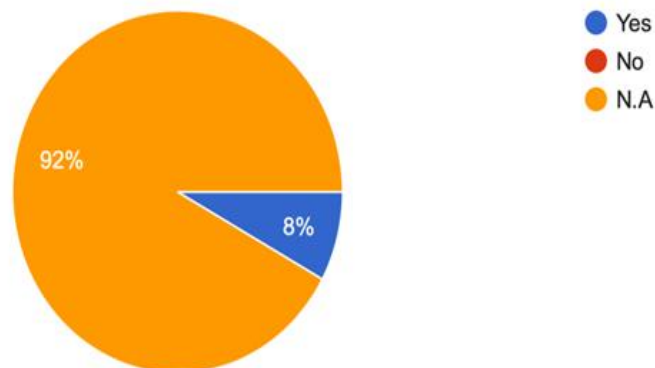
If yes, then did you go to a sport psychologist?
50 responses



Source: Authors own

Figure 16: How helpful was the treatment

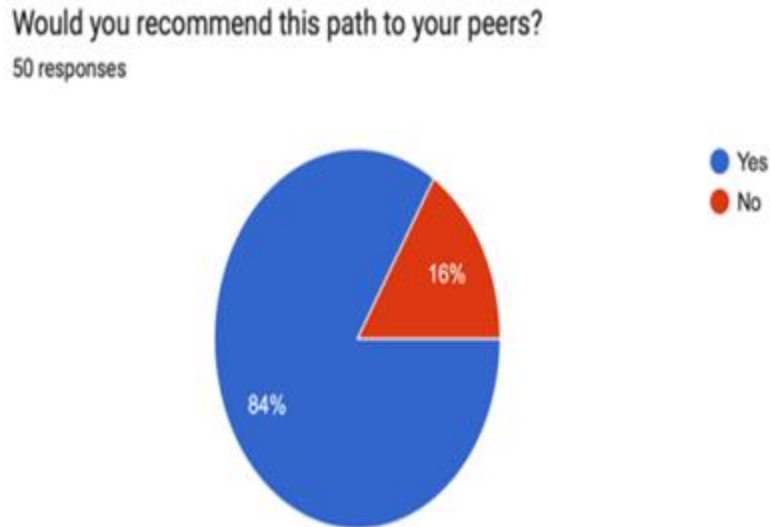
Did it help?
50 responses



Source: Authors Own

The results indicate an overwhelming tilt towards the help the respondents received by visiting the sports psychologist.

Figure 17: Would you further recommend this treatment



Source: Authors Own

The results of the survey conducted amongst school-going children of elite schools in India have clearly indicated the positive impact of sports psychologists on them. They did not have any inhibition in getting treated by these experts, who were recommended either by the school authorities or by their parents. In almost all cases, the results have been phenomenal, further paving the way for wholeheartedly recommending such treatments to their peers.

6. Conclusion

Research, as well as the short survey, has clearly concluded that sports psychology is an extremely integral part of the Indian sports scenario. The stigma that was earlier attached to such “help” is definitely on the decline. This seems to be true not only in the area of sports but in all other fields as well. As stress and competition has increased worldwide, the need to get professional help to attain one’s best possible performance has become integral. Psychologists, who are a part of the medical fraternity, are required for this purpose. This has been slowly indoctrinated in the Indian Sports World. It became popular and acceptable when the IPL entered the Indian Scenario. The results it showed encouraged almost all athletes at every level to take the course of seeking psychological support. These positive results further encouraged its adoption by the Indian Ministry of Sports and other associations.

The short survey conducted also reflected similar results, indicating clearly that it is acceptable across various sports and age groups.

References

- 1) Vippene, J. (2007). The Role of Sport Psychology in Sports' Performance Enhancement December 2007; Rivers State University of Science and Technology Victor Emeribe NHSU. Research Gate
- 2) How Does Sport Psychology Actually Improve Athletic Performance? A Framework to Facilitate Athletes' and Coaches' Understanding Chris J. Gee View all authors and affiliations. (n.d.). Sage, 34(5)
- 3) Psychological imagery in sport and performance free Krista J. Munroe-Chandler and Michelle D. Guerrero <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.013.228> Published online: 26 April 2017 Summary. (2017). Oxford Research Encyclopedia.
- 4) Roberts, G.Nerstad, G.L, Lemyre, P.N, (2018). Motivation in Sport and Performance.<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.013.150> Published online: 30 July 2018 Summary. Oxford Research Encyclopedia.
- 5) Peters, H.J, Kevin, M.A, A, Stefanek. University of Motivation in Sport: Theory and Application April 2011 DOI:10.1002/9780470979952.ch17 In book: Handbook of Motivational Counseling (pp.415-435) Edition: 2ndChapter: Motivation in Sport: Theory and Application Publisher: Wiley-Blackwell Editors: W. Miles Cox& Eric Klinger; South Adult Mental Health Co. (2011). Research Gate.
- 6) Thakkar, A.Sports Psychology and its Need in India October 2019Indian Journal of Mental Health 7(2):143-147 Royal Roads University. (2011). Research Gate.