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Effect of positive self talk training on competitive anxiety: an intervention study on male and female

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ABSTRACT

This study was aimed to examine the effect of positive self-talk training on competitive anxiety of anxious athletes. Participants were 52 team sports players (n=26 females and n=26 males), aged 18-23 years, randomly assigned into experimental group (13 males and 13 females) and control group (13 males and 13 females). The experimental group received a positive self-talk training for 30 days and control was without any type of treatment. The dependent variables (competitive anxiety, general fear of failure) were assessed before and after the intervention. It was expected that positive self-talk reduces competitive anxiety, general fear of failure and increases the self-confidence. As expected, positive self-talk training decreased the level of competitive anxiety and general fear of failure and increased the self-confidence of the experimental group. The present study provides preliminary evidence that the positive self-talk training for a period of 1 month can be used as an effective tool to reduce competitive anxiety and general fear of failure and enhance the self-confidence.

Keywords: Competitive Anxiety, Positive Self-Talk.

1. INTRODUCTION

Lot of athletes and sports people feel they are struggling but can't necessarily pin point exactly how or why. Anxiety is a common state of emotions faced by athletes during sports. Automatic thoughts occur in the mind create an involuntary movement of the body (for example: trembling), during anxious state of athlete which distracts an athlete from his performance.

Based on the previous work of Lazarus (1966) and Jones (1990), anxiety can be defined as a combination of negative cognitive thoughts and physiological responses to uncertain appraisals of coping with stressful demands. A more recent textbook definition defines anxiety as "a negative emotional state in which feelings of nervousness, worry, and apprehension are associated with activation or arousal of the body" (Weinberg & Gould 2011, p.78).

Competitive anxiety is a multi-component state that comes from the cognitive evaluation of a competitive situation. Competitive anxiety arises from the situational factors (such as sports or tough task) and personal factors (expectations of high goals, age, expectations of being a high achiever). Competitive anxiety occurs before and during the game which can be cognitive (negative thoughts, fear about performance), somatic (vomiting, increase in heart rate and sweating) and behavior (biting nails, aggressiveness).

Fear of failure and the individual's goal orientation are two factors that may play a role in the development and interpretation of pre-competitive anxiety. The classical definition of fear of failure is a motive to avoid failure in evaluative situations based on anticipatory shame upon failure (Atkinson, 1957; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953).

This multidimensional model of fear of failure encompasses five main beliefs that are related to the evaluation of fear. The five lower order fears include: fear of shame and embarrassment, fear of devaluing one's self estimate, fear of having an uncertain future, fear of important others losing interest, and fear of upsetting important others. Fear of failure has been shown to elicit negative effects in athletes such as negative self-talk (Conroy & Metzler, 2004) and to affect their well-being, behavior, and performance.

(Lavalley, Sagar, & Spray, 2009). Fear of shame and embarrassment has been linked to increased self-blame, reduced self-affirmation while failing and avoidance achievement goals (MAV and PAV) (Conroy, 2004). Because individuals associate failure with adverse consequences, it is imperative to understand how fear of failure and goal orientations impact levels of precompetitive anxiety.

Many different psychological skills training programs have been developed to teach athletes skills and techniques such as anxiety management, imagery, goal setting, concentration, self-talk, thought stopping and muscle relaxation technique (Weinberg & Williams, 1998). The implementation of a psychological program in the athlete's daily routine may result in the successful handling of pressure and anxiety which in turn enhance athletic performance. By establishing a psychological skills training (PST) program early, it may be possible for athletes to reach their potential more quickly by learning how to perform consistently through increased behavioral control (Balague, 2000). Psychological skills training programs have been shown to be effective for improving elite athletes' performances in golf putting (Cohen, Tenenbaum, & English, 2006; Thomas & Fogarty, 1997), tennis (Mamassis & Doganis, 2004) and football (Holm, Beckwith, Ehde, & Tinius, 1996).

Self-talk is a cognitive-behavioral intervention for reducing anxiety and for changing a behavior (Ellis 1979; Meichenbaum, 1977). Sports psychologists, coaches are giving a value to positive self-talk for reducing anxiety and for enhancing a performance (Gallwey, 1974; Gould, Eklund & Jackson 1922a, 1992b; Williams & Leffingwell, 1996; Zinsser, Bunker & William, 2000).

Self-talk is a psychological term in which a statement that an athlete asks to themselves about themselves in our mind it can be positive, negative and instructional statements. Everyone's self-talk was different according to their situation. Self-talk is a cognitive technique that can help to reduce anxiety and enhance to competitive concentration. Self-talk is the conscious and subconscious statements that comes in our mind before, during and after the competition, by which athletes' emotions and confidence affected, which later affect the performance of athletes.

- Positive self-talk was explained words and statements which helps to athletes being a happy or being confident (Hanton & Jones, 1999).
- Negative self-talk was explained as which words and statements athlete said to himself that can lead him towards defeat (Elko & Ostrow, 1991).
- Instructional self-talk has been classified as the need to guide our self through a specific task such as new skill (Hardy et al., 2001; Vanraalte).

Self-talk is said to be, "dialogue in which the individual interprets feelings and perceptions, regulates and changes evaluations and convictions, and gives him/herself instructions and reinforcement" (Hardy et al. 2001). Basically, self-talk allows for an individual to take the perspective of another in their own mind and converse with themselves. When experiencing somatic and specific cognitive anxiety related symptoms, including doubts about performance and physical shaking, participants found that self-talk actually helped to control the anxiety responses. Self-talk helps to increase concentration on the task at hand. Increased levels of effort and motivation may be found by using constructive and adaptive statements regarding personal accomplishments and positive verbalizations about the training leading up to the competition (Hatzigeorgiadis, 2008).

Based on their findings, many researchers have thoroughly supported that self-talk can be an effective cognitive strategy for skill acquisition and performance enhancement," (Goltsois, Hatzigeorgiadis, Theodorakis & Zourbanos, 2008).

1.1 Hypothesis

Significant gender difference will be found that positive self-talk shows more effect on females than males because females are more anxious as compared to males.

2. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study design

It is a pre- post experimental design.

2.2 Samples

The present study was conducted on university athletes. All players were taken from team sports (i.e., football, basketball, volleyball, handball and cricket). The total sample size was 52 players (N=52; n=26 males and n=26 females) aged between 18 to 23 years.

2.3 Setting

Data was collected from sports ground of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Punjab.

2.4 Inclusive criteria

- All participants are players.
- Male and female athletes of team sports.
- Age of the participants lies between 18 to 23 years.
- The players are not suffering from any psychological or physiological illness.

2.5 Tools for data collection

- Competitive state anxiety inventory-2 (CSAI-2); Martens et al. (1990): CSAI- 2 is most widely used to measure the competitive anxiety in sports psychology research. In CSAI-2 consists of total 27 item. Each item has 4 options. Participants

respond on Likert SCALE from 1 (“not at all”) to 4 (“very much”) options. These 27 items divided into three subscales that assess cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and self-confidence which means each subscale contains 9 items. each subscale has an individually scoring range from 9 to 36. Then scores will be summed with each other. lower range of scores shows a low anxiety and higher score shows a higher anxiety.

- **Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (PFAI); Conroy (2001):** General fear of failure was assessed with PFAI. In PFAI consists of 25 items. The responses for this scale ranges from -2 (don’t believe at all) to +2 (believe 100%). PFAI provides score for athletes in five aversive consequences of failure: experiencing shame and embarrassment; having an uncertain future; having important others lose interest; upsetting important others; devaluing one’s self- estimate. These five appraisal scores can be combined to yield a score for a higher order, of general fear of failure factor. Two forms of the PFAI are provided in this scale. Form A is identical to the form that has been used in all of the published research on the PFAI up to 2003. Form B includes a minor modification to one item (#12) that has been recommended in three studies of PFAI score validity (Conroy & Metzler, I press; Conroy, Metzler, & Hofer, in press; Conroy, Willow & Metzler, 2002). Users are encouraged to use Form B to reduce measurement error and increase the stability of score overtime.

2.6 Procedure

The athletes who volunteered for this study were further randomly assigned into two groups:

1. Experimental group in which the athletes received positive self-talk session perday for 30 days. Each session last for 15-20minutes.
2. A control group was without anyintervention.

Informed consent was taken from all the participants after explaining the purpose of the study and confidentiality was maintain as per ethical code. Proper environment was given to all the participants to accomplish the task. The test was conducted in threephases.

Phase 1: Pre-Test:

- First, competitive state anxiety inventory (CSAI-2) was administered on the 52 athletes.
- After those 52 athletes were given performance failure appraisal inventory (PFAI)to assess the fear offailure.
- Any doubt related to items on scale was solved onthe spot.

Phase 2: randomization and intervention to experimental group:

- 52 selected athletes were randomly divided into 2 groups, each group comprised of 26players.
- Experimental group have 13 male and 13 female athletes. These athletes were given positive self-talk training for 1month.
- Control group have 13 male and 13 female athletes. These athletes were not be given any type of treatmenttraining.

Phase 3: Post- Test:

- Boththescaleswereadministeredonthebothgroupsagainafter 1month.
- Scoring was done as per the scoring keys in the givenmanual.
- After obtaining the scores, scores of pre-testand post-test was reviewed and further statistical analysis were done to see whether the positive self-talk training has affected the level of competitive anxiety ofathletes or not.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Between or unpaired group analysis of experimental group (male; n=13) or control group (male;n=13):

Table 1: Comparison of pre and post cognitive anxiety of experimental group male (n=13) and control group male (n=13)

Unpaired T Test	Comparison of experimental group (male) or control group (male)			
	Cognitive anxiety			
	PRE		POST	
	Experimental Male	Control Male	Experimental Male	Control Male
Mean	24.00	23.00	20.54	23.15
S.D.	4.282	3.916	5.753	4.079
Number	13	13	13	13
Mean Difference	1.00		2.62	
Unpaired T Test	0.621		1.337	
P value	0.5402		0.1938	
Table Value at 0.05	2.06		2.06	
Result	Not-Significant		Not-Significant	

The above table shows the difference between pre and post-testing on cognitive anxiety of the experimental group (male) and control group (male). The mean score of the experimental group male is 24.00 and the control group male is 23.00 in pre-testing on cognitive anxiety. The mean difference is 1.00 on cognitive anxiety of pre mean scores in the experimental group (male) and control group (male). Statistically, there is no significant difference noted between the pre-testing of the experimental group (male) and the control group (male). The mean score of the experimental group male is 20.54 and the control group male is 23.15 in post-testing on cognitive anxiety. The mean difference is 2.62 on cognitive anxiety of post mean scores in the experimental group (male) and control group (male). Statistically, there is no significant difference noted between the post-testing of experimental group (male) and control

group(male).

Table 2 Comparison of pre and post somatic anxiety of experimental group male (n=13) and control group male (n=13)

Unpaired T Test	Comparison of experimental group (male) or control group (male)			
	Somatic anxiety			
	PRE		POST	
	Experimental Male	Control Male	Experimental Male	Control Male
Mean	20.46	19.15	17.69	18.23
S.D.	3.382	5.367	4.479	4.400
Number	13	13	13	13
Mean Difference	1.31		0.54	
Unpaired T Test	0.743		0.309	
P value	0.4646		0.7598	
Table Value at 0.05	2.06		2.06	
Result	Not-Significant		Not-Significant	

The above table shows the difference between pre and post-testing on somatic anxiety of the experimental group (male) and control group (male). The mean score of the experimental group male is 20.46 and the control group male is 19.15 in pre-testing on somatic anxiety. The mean difference is 1.31 on somatic anxiety of pre mean scores in the experimental group (male) and control group (male). Statistically, there is no significant difference noted between the pre-testing of the experimental group (male) and the control group (male). The mean score of the experimental group male is 17.69 and the control group male is 18.23 in post-testing on somatic anxiety. The mean difference is 0.54 on somatic anxiety of post mean scores in the experimental group (male) and control group (male). Statistically, there is no significant difference noted between the post- testing of experimental group (male) and control group (male).

Table 3 Comparison of pre and post self-confidence of experimental group male (n=13) and control group male (n=13)

Unpaired T Test	Comparison of experimental group (male) or control group (male)			
	Self-confidence			
	PRE		POST	
	Experimental Male	Control Male	Experimental Male	Control Male
Mean	23.69	24.23	27.23	24.23
S.D.	4.590	5.231	5.069	5.231
Number	13	13	13	13
Mean Difference	0.54		3.00	
Unpaired T Test	0.279		1.485	
P value	0.7826		0.1505	
Table Value at 0.05	2.06		2.06	
Result	Not-Significant		Not-Significant	

The above table shows the difference between pre and post-testing on self- confidence of the experimental group (male) and control group (male). The mean score of the experimental group male is 23.69 and the control group male is 24.23 in pre-testing on self-confidence. The mean difference is 0.54 on self-confidence of pre mean scores in the experimental group (male) and control group (male). Statistically, there is no significant difference noted between the pre-testing of the experimental group (male) and the control group (male). The mean score of the experimental group male is 27.23 and the control group male is 24.23 in post-testing on self-confidence. The mean difference is 3.00 on self-confidence of post mean scores in the experimental group (male) and control group (male). Statistically, there is no significant difference noted between the post- testing of experimental group (male) and control group (male).

Table 4 Comparison of pre and post general fear of failure of experimental group male (n=13) and control group male (n=13)

Unpaired T Test	Comparison of experimental group (male) or control group (male)			
	general fear of failure (PFAI)			
	PRE		POST	
	Experimental Male	Control Male	Experimental Male	Control Male
Mean	0.19	0.21	0.23	0.21
S.D.	0.059	0.081	0.198	0.079
Number	13	13	13	13
Mean Difference	0.02		0.02	
Unpaired T Test	0.693		0.390	
P value	0.4949		0.7001	
Table Value at 0.05	2.06		2.06	
Result	Not-Significant		Not-Significant	

The above table shows the difference between pre and post-testing on general fear of failure of the experimental group (male) and control group (male).

control group (male). The mean score of the experimental group male is 0.19 and the control group male is 0.21 in pre- testing on general fear of failure. The mean difference is 0.02 on general fear of failure of pre mean scores in the experimental group (male) and control group (male). Statistically, there is no significant difference noted between the pre-testing of the experimental group (male) and the control group (male). The mean score of the experimental group male is 0.23 and the control group male is 0.21 in post-testing on general fear of failure. The mean difference is 0.02 on general fear of failure of post mean scores in the experimental group (male) and control group (male). Statistically, there is no significant difference noted between the post-testing of experimental group (male) and control group (male).

3.2 Between or unpaired group analysis of experimental group (female; n=13) or control group (female; n=13):

Table 1 Comparison of pre and post cognitive anxiety of experimental group female (n=13) and control group female (n=13)

Unpaired T Test	Comparison of experimental group (female) or control group (female)			
	Cognitive anxiety			
	PRE		POST	
	Experimental Female	Control Female	Experimental Female	Control Female
Mean	21.85	22.77	18.08	22.77
S.D.	3.211	1.536	2.597	1.536
Number	13	13	13	13
Mean Difference	0.92		4.69	
Unpaired T Test	0.935		5.608	
P value	0.3590		<0.001	
Table Value at 0.05	2.06		2.06	
Result	Not-Significant		Significant	

The above table shows the difference between pre and post-testing on cognitive anxiety of the experimental group (female) and control group (female). The mean score of the experimental group female is 21.85 and the control group female is 22.77 in pre-testing on cognitive anxiety. The mean difference is 0.92 on cognitive anxiety of pre mean scores in the experimental group (female) and control group (female). Statistically, there is no significant difference noted between the pre-testing of the experimental group (female) and the control group (female). The mean score of the experimental group female is 18.08 and the control group female is 22.77 in post-testing on cognitive anxiety. The mean difference is 4.69 on cognitive anxiety of post mean scores in the experimental group (female) and control group (female). Statistically, cognitive anxiety is significant at $p < 0.05$ level in post-testing of experimental group (female) and control group (female).

Table 2 Comparison of pre and post somatic anxiety of experimental group female (n=13) and control group female (n=13)

Unpaired T Test	Comparison of experimental group (female) or control group (female)			
	Somatic anxiety			
	PRE		POST	
	Experimental Female	Control Female	Experimental Female	Control Female
Mean	21.77	22.92	14.46	22.46
S.D.	3.855	3.926	2.904	3.455
Number	13	13	13	13
Mean Difference	1.15		8.00	
Unpaired T Test	0.756		6.391	
P value	0.4569		<0.001	
Table Value at 0.05	2.06		2.06	
Result	Not-Significant		Significant	

The above table shows the difference between pre and post-testing on somatic anxiety of the experimental group (female) and control group (female). The mean score of the experimental group female is 21.77 and the control group female is 22.92 in pre-testing on somatic anxiety. The mean difference is 1.15 on somatic anxiety of pre mean scores in the experimental group (female) and control group (female). Statistically, there is no significant difference noted between the pre-testing of the experimental group (female) and the control group (female). The mean score of the experimental group female is 14.46 and the control group female is 22.46 in post-testing on somatic anxiety. The mean difference is 8.00 on somatic anxiety of post mean scores in the experimental group (female) and control group (female). Statistically, somatic anxiety is significant at $p < 0.05$ level in post-testing of experimental group (female) and control group (female).

Table 3 Comparison of pre and post self-confidence of experimental group female (n=13) and control group female (n=13)

Unpaired T Test	Comparison of experimental group (female) or control group (female)			
	Self-confidence			
	PRE		POST	
	Experimental Female	Control Female	Experimental Female	Control Female
Mean	24.00	23.31	28.23	23.15

S.D.	3.979	5.893	2.619	5.843
Number	13	13	13	13
Mean Difference	0.69		5.08	
Unpaired T Test	0.351		2.859	
P value	0.7286		0.0087	
Table Value at 0.05	2.06		2.06	
Result	Not-Significant		Significant	

The above table shows the difference between pre and post-testing on self- confidence of the experimental group (female) and control group (female). The mean score of the experimental group female is 24.00 and the control group female is 23.31 in pre-testing on self-confidence. The mean difference is 0.69 on self-confidence of pre mean scores in the experimental group (female) and control group (female). Statistically, there is no significant difference noted between the pre-testing of the experimental group (female) and the control group (female). The mean score of the experimental group female is 28.23 and the control group female is 23.15 in post-testing on self-confidence. The mean difference is 5.08 on self-confidence of post mean scores in the experimental group (female) and control group (female). Statistically, self-confidence is significant at $p < 0.05$ level in post-testing of experimental group (female) and control group (female).

Table 4 Comparison of pre and post general fear of failure of experimental group female (n=13) and control group female (n=13)

Unpaired T Test	Comparison of experimental group (female) or control group (female)			
	general fear of failure (PFAI)			
	PRE		POST	
	Experimental Female	Control Female	Experimental Female	Control Female
Mean	0.17	0.15	0.07	0.15
S.D.	0.070	0.085	0.017	0.084
Number	13	13	13	13
Mean Difference	0.02		0.08	
Unpaired T Test	0.629		3.452	
P value	0.5353		0.0021	
Table Value at 0.05	2.06		2.06	
Result	Not-Significant		Significant	

The above table shows the difference between pre and post-testing on general fear of failure of the experimental group (female) and control group (female). The mean score of the experimental group female is 0.17 and the control group female is 0.15 in pre- testing on general fear of failure. The mean difference is 0.02 on general fear of failure of pre mean scores in the experimental group (female) and control group (female). Statistically, there is no significant difference noted between the pre-testing of the experimental group (female) and the control group (female). The mean score of the experimental group female is 0.07 and the control group female is 0.15 in post-testing on general fear of failure. The mean difference is 0.08 on general fear of failure of post mean scores in the experimental group (female) and control group (female). Statistically, general fear of failure is significant at $p < 0.05$ level in post-testing of experimental group (female) and control group (female).

4. DISCUSSION

With regards to the primary purpose of the current study, was to examine the effect of Positive Self-Talk on Competitive Anxiety (Cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety and self- confidence) and Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (general fear of failure). Main hypothesis of the current study are as follows:

1. The significant gender is found that positive self-talk shows more effect on females than males because anxiety thoughts effects on females as compared to males. As expected, above mentioned hypotheses were tested and accepted.

In the present study, the results of between group (i.e., experimental male and control male group) showed that no significant difference was noted in post mean scores of experimental male group and control male group on all measured variables. whereas, the results of between group (i.e., experimental female and control female group) showed that significant difference was noted in post mean scores of experimental female group and control female group on all measured variables. It revealed that positive self-talk produced a significant improvement in experimental group of females as compared to experimental group of males.

Eric (1996) reported that no significant relationship between male and female athletes in competitive anxiety and self-confidence level. But when they were investigated based on the nature of sport field (individual and group based), it became clear that female athletes had higher cognitive anxiety and somatic anxiety and lower self-confidence as compared to male ones. Mutlu Turkmen, Taner Bozkus, Atahan Altintas (2013) studied the relationship between motivation orientations and competitive anxiety in Bocce players, and gender differences in this relationship. Results revealed that female players were observed to have slightly higher competitive anxiety level than males. Farooq Hussain, Salimullah Khan, Riasat Ali (2016) examined the sports Pre-competitive anxiety in university level male and female. Results was found that Pre-competitive anxiety of female university athletes was higher than males. Besim Halilaj, Florim Gallopeni Ilir Gllareva (2016) examined Pre and Post competitive anxiety and Self-Confidence in Kosovo gymnasts. The participant was 46 gymnasts aged 15 to 27, 14 female and 32 males. The conclusion of the study that anxiety is higher in the female gymnasts, and self-confidence is higher to male gymnasts. Noor Muhammad, mohibullah khan, Wasim khan

(2020) found similar results when they studied the effects of different types of anxiety. These researches supported that anxiety thoughts effect females rather than males.

Maryam Alibabaei, Jalal VahhabiHomabadi, Shahnaz Khalegiphor (2019) examined the effect of mixed training of kindness and positive self-talk on resiliency, hostility and positive feelings towards spouse in women who have experienced betrayal in Isfahan city. The experimental group of females received kindness therapy and Positive Self-Talk in 11 sessions that each lasted 100 minutes. Results shows that mixed training of kindness and positive self-talk enhancing resiliency can reduce hostility. Hilary Gail stokes (1998) studied the analysis on self-talk and self-confidence with female tennis players. Participants were three female tennis players from a westcoast university. The results indicate that positive self-talk increased self-confidence of female players.

In the current study, the results of within group among genders and both between group (i.e., experimental male or control male & experimental female or control female) results showed that positive self-talk effectively reduced competitive anxiety level of females which is confirmed from the above-mentioned researches.

As expected in the current study, the results of between group (i.e., experimental male or control male & experimental female or control female) support the hypothesis that significant gender difference will be found that positive self -talk shows more effect on females than males because anxiety thoughts effects on females as compared to males. It was concluded that the Positive Self-Talk effectively reduced the level of female's competitive anxiety as compared to males.

5. CONCLUSION

The present study provides preliminary evidence that positive self-talk training for a period of 1 month can be used as an effective tool to reduce cognitive and somatic anxiety, general fear of failure and enhance self-confidence. The results of between group (i.e., experimental male or control male & experimental female or control female) indicates that one-month practice of Positive Self-Talk training produced a significant improvement; i.e., decrease in Cognitive Anxiety, Somatic Anxiety, and increase in Self-Confidence of the experimental group of females as compared to experimental group of males under this study.

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