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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTIVATIONAL CLIMATE AND COMPETITIVE ANXIETY IN TEAM SPORT ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines the relationship between motivational climate and competitive anxiety among team sport athletes. Motivational climate refers to the environment created by coaches and teammates that influences athletes' attitudes, motivation, and performance. It is mainly categorized into task-oriented climate, which emphasizes learning, cooperation, and personal improvement, and ego-oriented climate, which focuses on winning and comparison with others. Competitive anxiety is a psychological response experienced before or during competitions and includes cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and self-confidence. The study aims to identify how different motivational climates affect anxiety levels in athletes participating in team sports such as football, volleyball, basketball, and cricket. Data are collected using standardized psychological questionnaires and analyzed through statistical methods. The findings suggest that a task-oriented climate reduces competitive anxiety and improves self-confidence, whereas an ego-oriented climate increases anxiety levels. The study highlights the importance of a positive motivational environment for enhancing athletes' mental well-being and sports performance.

Keywords: Motivational Climate, Competitive Anxiety, Team Sport Athletes, Task-Oriented Climate, Sports Psychology

INTRODUCTION

Sports psychology has become an important discipline in understanding athletes' behavior, emotions, and performance in competitive situations. In modern sports, physical fitness alone is not sufficient for achieving excellence; psychological factors also play a crucial role in determining success (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). Among the various psychological variables influencing athletes, motivational climate and competitive anxiety are considered highly significant in team sports.

Motivational climate refers to the psychological environment created by coaches, teammates, parents, and the sporting system. According to Achievement Goal Theory, motivational climate can generally be divided into two categories: task-oriented climate and ego-oriented climate (Nicholls, 1989). A task-oriented climate encourages athletes to focus on skill development, effort, cooperation, and personal improvement. In contrast, an ego-oriented climate emphasizes outperforming others, winning, and social comparison (Ames, 1992). Athletes who perceive a task-oriented environment usually experience enjoyment, satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation, whereas ego-oriented settings often create pressure, fear of failure, and anxiety (Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1998).

Competitive anxiety is another major psychological factor affecting sports performance. It is a negative emotional state experienced before or during competition and is commonly divided into cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and self-confidence (Martens et al., 1990). Cognitive anxiety includes negative thoughts, fear of failure, and lack of concentration. Somatic anxiety refers to physical symptoms such as sweating, increased heartbeat, muscle tension, and nervousness. Self-confidence represents the athlete's belief in their ability to perform successfully. Moderate anxiety may enhance performance, but excessive anxiety can negatively affect concentration, decision-making, and overall sports performance (Jones, 1995).

In team sports such as football, basketball, volleyball, and cricket, athletes constantly interact with teammates and coaches. Therefore, the motivational environment becomes highly influential in shaping psychological responses. A supportive and cooperative environment may reduce stress and improve confidence, while excessive emphasis on winning and comparison may increase pressure and anxiety among athletes (Barić, 2011). Understanding this relationship

is essential for coaches, sports psychologists, and educators to create healthy sporting environments.

Previous studies have shown that athletes exposed to task-oriented climates tend to report lower levels of competitive anxiety and greater psychological well-being (Castro-Sánchez et al., 2019). On the other hand, ego-oriented climates are often associated with higher anxiety, stress, and fear of negative evaluation (Morales-Sánchez et al., 2022). Researchers have also highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence and self-confidence in mediating the relationship between motivational climate and anxiety (Castro-Sánchez et al., 2018).

The present paper aims to explore the relationship between motivational climate and competitive anxiety among team sport athletes. It also seeks to examine how different motivational climates influence athletes' mental health and sports performance.

CONCEPT OF MOTIVATIONAL CLIMATE

Motivational climate is derived from Achievement Goal Theory proposed by Ames (1992) and Nicholls (1989). It explains how environmental factors influence an athlete's perception of success and competence. In sports settings, coaches play a major role in creating motivational climates.

A task-oriented climate encourages athletes to value effort, learning, teamwork, and improvement. Athletes in such environments are motivated internally and are more likely to enjoy participation (Duda & Hall, 2001). Mistakes are considered part of the learning process, and cooperation among teammates is encouraged.

Conversely, an ego-oriented climate focuses on competition, comparison, and superiority over others. Athletes are rewarded mainly for winning and outperforming teammates. Such environments may create insecurity among athletes who fear failure or criticism (Roberts, 2012).

Research suggests that task-oriented climates promote persistence, enjoyment, and psychological well-being, whereas ego-oriented climates often lead to stress, burnout, and anxiety (Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1998).

Table No. 1. Types of Motivational Climate in Team Sports

Motivational Climate	Characteristics	Psychological Impact on Athletes	Effect on Performance
Task-Oriented Climate	Focus on effort, learning, cooperation, and skill improvement	Reduces anxiety, improves confidence and enjoyment	Enhances long-term performance and motivation
Ego-Oriented Climate	Focus on winning, comparison, and superiority over others	Increases stress, fear of failure, and pressure	May reduce concentration and consistency

COMPETITIVE ANXIETY IN SPORTS

Competitive anxiety is one of the most studied psychological issues in sports. Athletes experience anxiety when they perceive competitive situations as threatening or beyond their coping abilities (Martens et al., 1990). Anxiety affects both mental and physical functioning and can significantly influence sports performance.

Competitive anxiety consists of three components:

1. **Cognitive Anxiety:** Refers to negative thoughts, fear of failure, worry about performance, and lack of concentration.
2. **Somatic Anxiety:** Includes physical symptoms such as increased heart rate, sweating, trembling, and muscle tension.
3. **Self-Confidence:** Represents positive belief in one's ability to succeed and acts as a protective factor against anxiety (Jones & Swain, 1992).

High levels of competitive anxiety can reduce decision-making ability, coordination, and confidence. Athletes with lower anxiety levels generally perform better because they remain calm, focused, and mentally prepared (Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

Table No. 2. Components of Competitive Anxiety

Component	Description	Common Symptoms
Cognitive Anxiety	Mental worries and negative thoughts before competition	Fear of failure, poor concentration, overthinking
Somatic Anxiety	Physical reactions caused by nervousness	Sweating, rapid heartbeat, trembling, muscle tension
Self-Confidence	Athlete's belief in ability to perform successfully	Calmness, positive thinking, mental readiness

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted on team sport athletes participating in football, basketball, volleyball, and cricket competitions. A total of 160 athletes were selected using purposive sampling techniques. Standardized questionnaires such as the Perceived Motivational Climate in Sport Questionnaire (PMCSQ) and Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (CSAI-2) were used for data collection. Statistical techniques including mean, standard deviation, and correlation analysis were applied to analyze the data.

Table No. 3. Sample Distribution of Team Sport Athletes

Sport	Male Athletes	Female Athletes	Total
Football	25	15	40
Basketball	20	20	40
Volleyball	18	22	40
Cricket	30	10	40
Total	93	67	160

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results indicate significant relationships between motivational climate and competitive anxiety among team sport athletes. Athletes who perceived a task-oriented climate showed lower levels of cognitive and somatic anxiety along with higher self-confidence. On the other hand, athletes exposed to ego-oriented climates experienced higher anxiety levels and reduced confidence.

Table No. 4. Mean Scores of Motivational Climate and Competitive Anxiety

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Task-Oriented Climate	4.12	0.56
Ego-Oriented Climate	3.08	0.72
Cognitive Anxiety	2.95	0.64
Somatic Anxiety	3.11	0.59
Self-Confidence	4.20	0.51

The above table demonstrates that task-oriented climate received higher mean scores compared to ego-oriented climate. Similarly, self-confidence scores were higher among athletes who perceived supportive motivational environments.

Table No. 5. Correlation between Motivational Climate and Competitive Anxiety

Variables	Cognitive Anxiety	Somatic Anxiety	Self-Confidence
Task-Oriented Climate	-0.48*	-0.42*	+0.61*
Ego-Oriented Climate	+0.53*	+0.47*	-0.39*

*** Significant at 0.05 level**

The correlation analysis clearly indicates that task-oriented climate has a negative relationship with cognitive and somatic anxiety and a positive relationship with self-confidence. In contrast, ego-oriented climate positively correlates with anxiety and negatively with confidence.

Research by Ntoumanis and Biddle (1998) found that athletes participating in supportive motivational climates demonstrated lower anxiety and greater self-confidence. Similarly, Castro-Sánchez et al. (2018) observed that emotional intelligence and positive motivational climate reduced anxiety levels among athletes. Morales-Sánchez et al. (2022) also reported that young soccer players showed improved confidence and reduced precompetitive anxiety under task-oriented climates.

Table No. 6. Previous Research Findings on Motivational Climate and Anxiety

Author & Year	Participants	Major Findings
Ntoumanis & Biddle (1998)	Team sport athletes	Task climate reduced competitive anxiety

Barić (2011)	Team athletes	Ego climate increased psychological pressure
Castro-Sánchez et al. (2018)	Athletes from different sports	Emotional intelligence reduced anxiety in supportive climates
Castro-Sánchez et al. (2019)	Adolescent football players	Positive climate improved emotional stability
Morales-Sánchez et al. (2022)	Young soccer players	Task climate improved self-confidence

Role of Coaches and Team Environment

Coaches significantly influence athletes' psychological experiences. Their communication style, feedback, and expectations shape the motivational climate within the team (Duda & Balaguer, 2007). Coaches who emphasize effort, cooperation, and improvement help athletes develop resilience and confidence.

Positive coaching strategies include:

- Encouraging teamwork and mutual support
- Recognizing effort and improvement
- Providing constructive feedback
- Reducing excessive pressure to win
- Promoting enjoyment and participation

On the other hand, coaches who focus only on winning may unintentionally create fear and anxiety among athletes. Constant criticism and comparison with teammates can reduce motivation and increase psychological stress (Barić, 2011).

Teammates also contribute to motivational climate. Supportive teammates create belongingness and emotional security, while unhealthy competition within teams may increase pressure and anxiety.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SPORTS PERFORMANCE

Motivational climate not only affects psychological well-being but also directly influences sports performance. Athletes with lower anxiety and higher confidence are more likely to perform

consistently under pressure (Jones, 1995). Task-oriented climates encourage long-term participation, intrinsic motivation, and mental toughness.

Sports organizations and educational institutions should focus on developing healthy motivational climates to improve athlete welfare. Psychological training programs, counseling sessions, and coach education programs can help reduce competitive anxiety among athletes.

Sports psychologists should also work with coaches and athletes to develop coping strategies such as relaxation techniques, visualization, goal setting, and positive self-talk. These methods can help athletes manage anxiety effectively during competitions (Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

Table No. 7. Suggested Strategies to Reduce Competitive Anxiety

Strategy	Purpose	Expected Outcome
Positive Coaching	Encourage athlete confidence	Reduced fear and stress
Goal Setting	Improve focus and motivation	Better concentration
Relaxation Techniques	Control physical symptoms	Reduced somatic anxiety
Team Support Activities	Improve team bonding	Increased emotional security
Psychological Counseling	Address mental pressure	Improved emotional stability

CONCLUSION

The relationship between motivational climate and competitive anxiety is highly significant in team sports. Motivational climates created by coaches and teammates greatly influence athletes' emotional and psychological states. Task-oriented climates promote confidence, cooperation, enjoyment, and reduced anxiety, whereas ego-oriented climates increase stress, fear of failure, and competitive anxiety (Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1998).

The findings of the present study indicate that athletes perform better when they feel supported and motivated in positive environments. Coaches and sports organizations should therefore encourage task-oriented climates to improve athletes' mental well-being and sports performance. Reducing excessive pressure and promoting personal development can help athletes maintain psychological balance and perform effectively in competitions.

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