Impact of Gender and Age on the Repertory of Coping to Tunisian Collective Sport

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to present the results of a study on the impact of age and sex on the repertory of coping used by Tunisian athletes in collective sport. In this context, we used the Arabic version of the inventory of sports adaptation strategies (Hajji et al., 2016) for 419 athletes, including 278 men and 141 women with an average age of 19.00 years (SD = 5.52). This measuring instrument includes ten first-order coping strategies arranged into three second-order coping strategies. The processing of the data collected by the IBM SPSS software showed the following results. Our study showed that female teen athletes are more likely to adopt coping strategies aimed at disengagement. However, male teen athletes use a task and distraction repertoire of coping. On the other hand, adult female athletes are moving more towards the coping of disengagement and distraction. However, adult male athletes use more task-based coping. Age and gender are therefore variables that directly influence the repertoire of coping among Tunisian athletes in team sport.

Introduction

Understanding how the athlete adopts coping strategies in the context of collective sport is a major issue, not only in terms of preventing risks to well-being, but also in terms of optimizing performance. Performance in team sports is part of a social environment characterized by several personal interactions (between athletes, athletes and staff...). In this approach, athletes must not only learn, acquire and maintain a high level of athletic competence. However, it is also essential to develop a repertory of coping strategies to meet the demands of this specific environment Hardy, et al. [1] Managing the stressful situation and studying its aspects at the level of collective sport is a well-developed research area is a priority for several authors Crocker, et al. [2] Tamminen et al., 2014; Nicholls, et al. [3] Moreover, represents, the crucial objective of our work to understand how Tunisian athletes manifest themselves in a competitive, stressful environment and what are the strategies of the coping shared with the performance in the context of collective sport characterized by the complexity of social relations.

Several approaches are based on the bipolarity of stress and coping in the field of sport does not directly meet our demands. Such as the cognitive-motivational-relational theory (TCMR) of emotions Lazarus, et al. [4,5] which forms a theoretical model frequently used in studies centralizing stress and coping, and is fundamentally based on cognitive assessment. In accordance with the “transactional” model of Lazarus and Folkman, coping is a dynamic mechanism that changes according to the situation.
Coping is one of the most centralized research concepts in sport [6,7]. Coping is a good predictor of performance [8-12]. Thanks to this concept, the explanatory mechanism of the stressful event and its consequences can be better understood [13]. To manage the specific stressful demands of the competition and to optimize performance, the athlete adapts to this mechanism [14-17] and seeks to overcome the stressful situation in order to maximize the successes of adaptation strategies, distracted adaptation strategies, and disengagement-based adaptation strategies [28,29]. Task-oriented coping strategies are designed to deal directly with the source of stress. This dimension merges the adaptation centered on the problem (exertion, logical analysis...) and the adaptation centered on the emotion (relaxation, control of the thought). In contrast, avoidance strategies include exit-oriented strategies that are used to escape the threatening situation. In addition, distraction-oriented strategies, which are used to temporarily de-center any provocations from the stressful situation. The current study centralizing variation in coping styles in the face of competitive stress among Tunisian athletes is trying to broaden our understanding of the difference in coping styles between gender and age. The use of a random sample of athletes affiliated with popular collective sports in Tunisia makes it possible to generalize to all adolescent and adult athletes, male and female. The review of the coping repertory among our participants adds valuable information on the skill level to manage competitive stress and anxiety and on preventive strategies to intervene in different phases of age and in relation to the athlete’s gender.

### Methodology

#### Population

419 athletes from collective sports including 278 men and 141 women with an average age of 19.00 years (SD: 5.52 years). At the national and international level, voluntarily participated in this study see Table 1.

#### Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants.

|                | Numbers | Percentage |
|----------------|---------|------------|
| Adult man      | 100     | 23.9       |
| Adult woman    | 56      | 13.4       |
| Total adult    | 156     | 37.2       |
| Adolescent man | 178     | 42.5       |
| Adolescent woman | 85      | 20.3       |
| Total adolescent | 263     | 62.8       |
| Total          | 419     | 100        |

#### Measures

In this study, we used the Arabic version of the inventory of sports competition adaptation strategies (Hajji Jamel et al., 2016). This questionnaire consists of 39 elements divided into ten first-order coping strategies, and three second-order coping strategies: task-based coping strategies, exit-oriented adaptation strategies and distraction-oriented adaptation strategies.

#### Procedures

Participants were asked to answer a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always), two hours after the competition. This questionnaire is designed to identify first and second-order coping strategies used to manage pre-competitive anxiety. All participants were previously informed about the purpose and procedure of the study.
study. Participation was voluntary and following the ethical charter, parental consent was required for athletes under 18 years of age.

**Results**

**Effect of Sex and Age on Coping**

The Levene homogeneity test indicates that the variance of the scores of different coping strategies is homogeneous (p-value > 5%). This allows us to perform the MANOVA multiple variance analysis to examine the effect of age and sex on the coping repertoire of our participants see (Tables 2 & 3) shows the correlations between the 10 coping strategies used by our participants. As shown in (Table 3), correlations between variables did not exceed 0.51, suggesting that multiple collinearity would not be a concern in variation analyses. The multiple variance analysis (MANOVA) indicates that sex and age have significant effects (Wilks lambda is significant at P <5%) on the choice of coping among Tunisian athletes in the collective sport see (Tables 4 & 5).

**Table 2: Demographic characteristics of participants.**

| Statistics Levene | ddl1 |ddl2 | p-value |
|-------------------|------|-----|---------|
| Mental imagery    | .642 | 6   | 262     | .696    |
| Effort expenditure| 1.825| 6   | 262     | .095    |
| Thought control   | .149 | 6   | 262     | .989    |
| Seeking support   | .378 | 6   | 262     | .893    |
| Relaxation        | .345 | 6   | 262     | .912    |
| Logical analysis  | .623 | 6   | 262     | .712    |
| Vventing of unpleasant emotions | 1.894| 6 | 262 | .082 |
| Disengagement     | 2.829| 6   | 262     | .011    |
| Social withdrawal | 1.394| 6   | 262     | .217    |
| Mental distraction| 5.300| 1   | 292     | .022    |

**Table 3: Inter-correlations among age and gender and coping repertory (N = 419).**

| Mental imagery     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Effort expenditure | .395**| 1 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Thought control    | .370**| .439**| 1|   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Seeking support    | -.072 | -.027 | .062 | 1|   |   |   |   |   |
| Relaxation         | .309**| .146**| .247**| -.059| 1|   |   |   |   |
| Logical analysis   | .489**| .473**| .375**| .014| .381**| 1|   |   |   |
| Vventing of emotions | .032 | .188**| .218**| .103*| -.021| .103*| 1|   |   |
| Disengagement      | .387**| .316**| .348**| -.041| .209**| .312**| .506**| 1|   |
| Social withdrawal  | .138**| -.011| -.045| -.089| .227**| .030| -.286**| -.050| 1|
| Mental distraction | -.146**| -.119*| -.217**| -.090| -.121*| -.341**| -.242**| -.226**| .221**|

Note: **p < .01. ***p < .001.

**Table 4: Effect of sex on coping.**

| Effect     | Value | D    | ddl of the hypothesis | Ddl error | Sig. |
|------------|-------|------|-----------------------|-----------|------|
| Sexe       | Trace of Pillai | .178| 6,129b | 10,000 | 283,000 | .000 |
|            | Wilks Lambda   | .822| 6,129b | 10,000 | 283,000 | .000 |
|            | Hotelling Trace| .217| 6,129b | 10,000 | 283,000 | .000 |
|            | Largest Roy Root| .217| 6,129b | 10,000 | 283,000 | .000 |

Note:

a. Plan: Originally ordered + Sex
b. Exact statistics
Table 5: The effect of age on coping.

| Effect          | Value     | D    | Ddl of the Hypothesis | Ddl Error | Sig.   |
|-----------------|-----------|------|-----------------------|-----------|--------|
| AGE             | Trace of Pillai | .692 | 1.207                 | 170,000   | 2760,000 | .039   |
| Wilks Lambda    | .471      | 1.247| 170,000               | 2336,235  | .020    |
| Hotelling Trace | .824      | 1.286| 170,000               | 2652,000  | .009    |
| Largest Roy Root| .291      | 4.727| 17,000                | 276,000   | .000    |

Plan: Originally ordered + AGE

The statistic is an upper bound of F that produces a lower bound for the significance threshold.

The Level of Coping According to the Age-Sex Crossing

Adolescents: Male adolescent athletes use more of the following coping strategies:
- The effort expenditure
- The mental imagery
- The thought control

In contrast, female adolescent athletes use the following coping strategies:
- The effort expenditure
- The thought control
- The venting of unpleasant emotions
- Logical analysis
- The mental imagery

However, adolescent male and female athletes use the mental distraction strategy in a similar way see (Table 6 & Figure 1).

Figure 1: The level of first order coping among male and female adolescents.

Table 6: The level of first order coping in male and female adolescents.

| Adolescent | Mental Imagery | Effort Expenditure | Thought Control | Seeking Support | Relaxation | Logical Analysis | Venting of Emotion | Disengagement | Social Withdrawal | Mental Distraction |
|------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|---------------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Male Mean  | 3.99           | 4.19               | 3.88            | 3.50            | 3.44      | 3.71             | 2.99                | 3.14          | 2.89              | 2.33              |
| SD         | .79            | .87                | .77             | .87             | .82       | .90              | 1.06                | 1.20          | .95               | 1.07              |
| N          | 178            | 178                | 178             | 178             | 178       | 178              | 178                 | 178           | 178               | 178               |
| Female Mean| 3.62           | 4.25               | 4.15            | 3.23            | 3.21      | 3.60             | 3.60                | 3.42          | 2.65              | 2.30              |
| SD         | .79            | .82                | .82             | .92             | .88       | .84              | .94                 | 1.06          | .96               | .91               |
| N          | 85             | 85                 | 85              | 85              | 85        | 85               | 85                  | 85            | 85                | 85                |
The Level of First-Order Coping in Adult Males and Females:
Adult male athletes are more likely to choose the following strategies:
- The effort expenditure
- The thought control
- The mental imagery
- The disengagement
- The logical analysis

In contrast, adult female athletes are more likely to seek the following strategies:
- The effort expenditure
- The thought control

In addition, adult male and female athletes use the following strategies in the same way see (Table 7 & Figure 2):
- The relaxation
- The mental distraction

The Level of Second-Order Coping in Male and Female Adolescents: For second-order coping, male adolescent athletes use more task-oriented and distraction coping strategies, whereas female adolescent athletes use more coping strategies oriented towards disengagement see (Table 8 & Figure 3).

The Level of Second Order Coping in Adult Males and Females: Adult male athletes are using more task-based and distracted coping strategies. While adult male and female athletes are similarly engaging in exit-oriented coping strategies (Table 9 & Figure 4).
Figure 3: The level of second order coping in adolescent males and female athletes.

Figure 4: Second order coping in adult male and female athletes.

Table 8: The level of second order coping in adolescent males and female athletes.

| Second Order Coping            | Adolescent |            |            |            | Woman |            |            |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------|------------|------------|
|                                |            | Man        | SD         | N          | Mean   | SD         | N          |
| Task-oriented coping           | 3.80       | .54        | 178        | 3.68       | .52    | 85         |
| Disengagement-oriented coping  | 3.06       | 1.04       | 178        | 3.50       | .85    | 85         |
| Distraction-oriented coping    | 2.61       | .82        | 178        | 2.46       | .65    | 85         |

Table 9: The level of second order coping in adult male and female athletes.

| Second Order Coping            | Adult      |            |            |            | Woman |            |            |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------|------------|------------|
|                                |            | Man        | SD         | N          | Mean   | SD         | N          |
| Task-oriented coping           | 4.05       | .20        | 100        | 3.78       | .36    | 56         |
| Disengagement-oriented coping  | 3.82       | .46        | 100        | 3.88       | .48    | 56         |
| Distraction-oriented coping    | 2.81       | .60        | 100        | 2.65       | .80    | 56         |
Discussion

The Effect of Age and Sex

The MANOVA multiple variance analysis indicates that age has a significant effect on the coping repertory used by Tunisian athletes in a sport team. Our results are corroborated by some studies. The perception of the stressful situation during adolescence is not necessarily the same in adulthood. This may be related to the development of the level of experience and the evolution of the coping repertoire Compas, et al. [30].

The framework of temporal dynamics Kuppens, et al. [31] explains the relationship between age and coping strategies Carstensen, et al. [32-34,22] support the concept that adaptation is a capacity that can evolve with experience and age. On the other hand, the MANOVA multiple variance analysis conducted as part of this study confirms the influence of gender on the coping repertory among our participants. Our findings are corroborated by several studies, Callahan, et al. [35] indicate that numerous studies on coping demonstrate the influence of sex on the choice of adaptation used to overcome the threatening situation.

The Level of Coping with Age and Sex

Our work confirms that female adolescent athletes are using more exit-oriented coping strategies, such as Venting of unpleasant emotions and disengagement. On the other hand, male teen athletes are more oriented towards coping task, such as mental imaging strategies, seeking support, relaxation, logical analysis and social withdrawal. On the other hand, adult female athletes are moving more towards coping focused on disengagement and distraction, such as strategies of evacuating unpleasant emotions and mental distraction. However, male adult athletes are more task-oriented coping, such as effort spending strategies, thought control, logical analysis and mental imaging. The results revealed by our study are consistent with most studies in the field of sport. Compas, et al. [30] and McCormick et al., (2007) found that adolescent athletes can better adapt to stressful situations. Reeves et al., (2009), confirm that the average adolescent athlete benefits more from emotion, but that the early adolescent athlete is more concerned about problem-based strategies. De Boo et al. (2009) show that older children are moving more towards cognitive strategies. Kowalski et al., (2001), reported that adolescents sometimes opt for avoidance-based adaptation through behavioural and cognitive leakage (Anshel et al., 2001). On the other hand, Chabrol, et al. [35] point out that young people are more focused on emotional strategies. The increasing age makes it easier to use problem-oriented strategies.

Adult athletes manage stress and better control their emotional reactions (Bebetsos et al., 2003). However, women generally seek social support to cope with stressful situations in sport Compas, et al. [30,25] Kolt et al., 1995; Philippe et al., 2004). In general, some studies show that men and women use different coping strategies (Anshel et al., 2001; Crocker, et al. [25] Yoo, 2001). However, other research finds no difference between the two sexes (Kowalski et al. 2005; Pensgaard et al., 1998; 1999), such as the study by Anshel et al., (2001) which indicate that no difference was found in soliciting social support and magical thinking among men and women.

Conclusion

This study, which examines the repertory of contextual coping used by Tunisian athletes to collective sport, confirms that age and gender have an influence on adaptation strategies. In addition, our participants use coping strategies randomly and not selectively, which may be consistent with the failure of mental preparation and competitive stress management. Task and distraction-oriented coping strategies dominate the coping repertory of adolescent Tunisian male athletes. In contrast, adolescent Tunisian female athletes are more likely to use coping strategies geared towards disengagement. On the other hand, task-oriented and disengagement coping strategies dominate the repertoire of coping among Tunisian adult male athletes. However, female Tunisian adult athletes are more demanding coping strategies oriented towards distraction and disengagement. In the high-level, task-oriented coping strategies are always positively associated with performance Gaudreau, et al. [9,36,37,16,17] and even to selection in a professional level Van Yperen, et al. [38] On the other hand, strategies oriented towards disengagement and distraction are negatively associated with performance Friedel, et al. [39-42]

Therefore, this study seems useful to understand how the coping process unfolds through age and gender. Moreover, how it manifests itself through the different situations encountered in the context of the collective sport in male and female Tunisian athletes.

Limits

One of the limitations of this study, on which we focused only on contextual adaptation, and we neglected the dispositional or intra-individual that is directly associated with personality traits and is characterized by its stability. Studies in the sports context have determined the effect of stable personality traits on coping choice Giacobbi, et al. [43-49].

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