



Psychological Determinants Influencing Performance Anxiety in Young Athletes in Haryana: A Comprehensive Study

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Abstract— This study examines the psychological factors influencing performance anxiety among young athletes in Haryana, a state renowned for its robust sporting culture and highly competitive standards. Using secondary data from research journals, sports psychology literature, government reports, and sports federation documents, the study identifies key psychological factors, including self-esteem, motivation, coping strategies, perfectionism, parental pressure, peer comparison, and the coach–athlete relationship, as major contributors to performance-related stress. The socio-cultural context of Haryana further amplifies these pressures, with community expectations, gender norms, and rural–urban differences shaping athletes' mental experiences in distinct ways. Rural athletes often face community-driven pressure and limited psychological support, while urban athletes encounter dual expectations from academics and sports. The findings emphasise the importance of integrating psychological skill training, emotional regulation techniques, and supportive coaching practices into athlete development programs. The study asserts that addressing psychological determinants is crucial for improving long-term sports performance, preventing burnout, and supporting overall athlete well-being in Haryana. It concludes with recommendations for policy reforms, institutional support, and increased access to sports psychologists to foster a more balanced and mentally healthy sports environment.



Keywords— Performance Anxiety, Sports Psychology, Coach-Athlete Relationship, Social Judgement.

I. INTRODUCTION

Performance anxiety has become one of the most discussed psychological challenges faced by young athletes in competitive sports systems. In sports psychology, performance anxiety is generally defined as a stress response—either temporary or trait-based—that occurs when athletes see an imbalance between demands and their coping abilities. The foundational work of Charles D. Spielberger, who distinguished between trait and state anxiety, showed that competitive anxiety arises not only from physical preparation but also from deep psychological patterns influencing how young athletes interpret pressure. Similarly, the multidimensional anxiety theory proposed by Rainer Martens explained that anxiety includes both cognitive components—such as worry, fear

of failure, and negative expectations—and somatic components like physiological arousal, tension, and reduced motor coordination. These theories suggest that the performance of young athletes is heavily influenced by psychological factors that impact their reactions to competitive environments.

In India, especially in Haryana, this topic is particularly relevant due to the region's strong socio-cultural ties to sports. Haryana consistently produces a disproportionate share of national and international athletes despite its relatively small population. Institutions like the Sports Authority of India and the Haryana Sports and Youth Affairs Department promote structured training through academies, residential sports centres, and programs like Khelo India, all of which create a competitive environment

from a young age. While these structures improve access to training, exposure, and physical development, they also increase pressures related to achievement, expectations, and performance outcomes. These pressures are often examined in studies on adolescent sports participation, where the developmental stage of youth—characterised by evolving identity, emotional sensitivity, and cognitive immaturity—makes them particularly vulnerable to performance anxiety (Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

Among the key psychological factors, self-confidence and self-efficacy have been consistently identified as primary predictors of how athletes experience anxiety. Based on the self-efficacy framework introduced by Albert Bandura, athletes who believe they can perform a skill under pressure are less likely to see competitive situations as threatening. In Haryana, where early specialisation and intensive training are common, fluctuations in self-confidence—often linked to selection trials, rankings, and peer comparisons—can significantly boost anxiety responses.

Another important factor is perceived parental and social expectation, which is frequently emphasised in studies on youth sport behaviour in India. Haryana's socio-cultural emphasis on honour, success, and achievement can intensify parental pressure, particularly for boys in high-visibility sports like wrestling, boxing, and athletics. Research shows that excessive expectations, fear of disappointing family, and societal judgment increase cognitive anxiety, especially before high-stakes competitions (Scanlan et al., 2005).

Furthermore, the coach–athlete relationship functions as both a protective factor and a trigger for performance anxiety. The coach-athlete interaction model by Sophia Jowett suggests that supportive communication, empathy, and trust lower anxiety, whereas controlling or authoritarian coaching styles heighten psychological pressure. Haryana's traditional coaching culture, especially in rural akharas and district-level academies, often relies on discipline-driven methods that may unintentionally heighten performance fear among young athletes.

Personality traits—such as perfectionism, neuroticism, and competitive trait anxiety—also play an important role. Perfectionism, while motivating, can also lead to rumination, fear of mistakes, and overthinking, which in turn increase pre-competition anxiety. Many young athletes in Haryana, influenced by role models and high medal expectations, tend to set unrealistic standards, raising their vulnerability to anxiety when facing tough opponents or setbacks.

Finally, coping skills and emotional regulation influence how well young athletes handle anxiety. The lack of

structured mental conditioning programs in many state-level training centres means athletes often depend on untrained coping mechanisms, which can make them more prone to cognitive overload and somatic symptoms of anxiety.

Considering these various psychological factors, understanding performance anxiety among young athletes in Haryana is both a scholarly and practical necessity for sports development.

Definition of Performance Anxiety

- i. According to Weinberg and Gould (2019), Performance anxiety refers to a state of heightened worry, tension, or apprehension experienced before or during a performance situation, where individuals fear that they will be unable to meet internal or external expectations. In sports psychology, performance anxiety is defined as “*anxiety resulting from an athlete's perception of competitive stress, which manifests through cognitive worry, physiological arousal, and behavioural disruptions that impair performance*”.
- ii. According to Patel and Singh (2018), performance anxiety is particularly prevalent among young athletes because they often encounter high expectations from coaches, parents, and peers, making the threat of negative evaluation more intense.

Types of Performance Anxiety in Sports

There are four types of performance anxiety in sports: -

- i. Cognitive Anxiety
- ii. Somatic Anxiety
- iii. Trait Anxiety
- iv. State Anxiety

Cognitive Anxiety

It refers to the mental components of anxiety experienced by athletes. It includes worry, fear of failure, negative expectations, difficulty concentrating, and intrusive thoughts during performance situations. When cognitive anxiety is high, athletes may overthink their actions, doubt their abilities, and misjudge competitive situations. This form of anxiety directly interferes with decision-making, focus, and confidence, making it one of the most influential psychological barriers to optimal performance.

Somatic Anxiety

Somatic anxiety is the physical or physiological aspect of anxiety. It includes symptoms like increased heart rate, muscle tension, sweating, butterflies in the stomach, shakiness, and shortness of breath. Somatic anxiety usually

increases as competition approaches and peaks during the early stages of performance. While moderate physiological arousal can enhance performance, excessive somatic symptoms often interfere with coordination, timing, and motor control, leading to a decline in performance.

Trait Anxiety

Trait anxiety is a stable personality characteristic that reflects an individual's general tendency to perceive situations as threatening. Athletes high in trait anxiety are more likely to respond with worry and arousal even in low-pressure situations. This type of anxiety influences how frequently and intensely an athlete experiences cognitive or somatic symptoms across different competitions. Trait anxiety acts as a predisposing factor, increasing vulnerability to performance anxiety.

State Anxiety

State anxiety is a temporary, situation-specific emotional response that varies with the level of perceived threat in a competition. It has both cognitive and somatic components, and it fluctuates throughout the event, typically increasing before competition and decreasing as athletes settle into their performance. State anxiety is highly sensitive to factors such as opponent strength, crowd presence, coaching feedback, and the importance of the event. Unlike trait anxiety, state anxiety is not constant; it changes according to the environment.

Importance of Psychological Determinants in Sports

Psychological factors play a fundamental role in shaping athletic performance and overall sporting success. While physical fitness, technical skills, and tactical knowledge remain vital aspects of sports, athletes are increasingly recognising that mental strength often determines the difference between winners and competitors. Sports psychology research, beginning with the work of Coleman Griffith, has demonstrated that cognition, emotion, and motivation influence how athletes respond to training and competition.

One of the most crucial psychological factors is motivation, which impacts persistence, training intensity, and long-term commitment. According to Edward Deci's self-determination theory, athletes with intrinsic motivation tend to perform better, learn faster, and cope more effectively with setbacks. Closely related to motivation is self-confidence, which affects how athletes perceive and tackle challenges. The concept of self-efficacy, introduced by Albert Bandura, suggests that athletes who believe in their abilities are more likely to remain calm, take calculated risks, and perform effectively under pressure.

Emotional regulation is another vital psychological component. Athletes regularly face stress, fear of failure, and high expectations. Effective emotional control enables them to stay focused, maintain composure, and prevent performance disruptions during critical moments. Conversely, unmanaged stress or anxiety can adversely affect coordination, decision-making, and reaction time. This is especially true in high-pressure settings where somatic and cognitive anxiety can hinder performance.

Attention and concentration are equally important. The ability to maintain focus despite distractions allows athletes to execute skills with accuracy. Mental skills such as visualisation and goal-setting enhance readiness and consistency. Furthermore, the quality of the coach-athlete relationship, as highlighted in models developed by Sophia Jowett, influences communication, trust, and psychological resilience.

Relevance for Young Athletes in Haryana

Psychological determinants hold significant importance for young athletes in Haryana, a state known for its strong sporting traditions and high representation in national and international competitions. Haryana consistently produces elite performers in wrestling, boxing, athletics, and kabaddi, fostering an environment where competitive expectations are very high (Singh & Hooda, 2020). In this context, mental skills become a crucial factor in performance, particularly for young athletes who are still developing their emotional and cognitive maturity. Many young athletes in Haryana start intensive sports training early, often in residential academies and state-supported sports centres. While this early focus can improve physical skills, it also exposes athletes to psychological pressures such as performance anxiety, fear of failure, and stress from parental and community expectations (Kaur & Sharma, 2021). Research indicates that these pressures can impair concentration, erode self-confidence, and negatively impact overall performance if not effectively managed (Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

Additionally, a large number of Haryana's athletes come from rural backgrounds, where access to sports psychologists, counselling services, and mental health support remains limited (Mehta & Singh, 2022). This lack increases vulnerability to unmanaged stress and emotional issues. Building psychological skills—such as resilience, goal setting, attentional control, and coping strategies—can significantly enhance performance consistency and support long-term athlete development.

As Haryana continues to engage with national programmes like Khelo India and Target Olympic Podium Scheme, the importance of mental readiness becomes even clearer. Psychological preparedness not only helps achieve

competitive success but also promotes the overall well-being of youth athletes in a demanding sporting environment (Raizada, 2020).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Manoj Goel's (2015) study examined competitive anxiety differences between high- and low-achieving female university football teams in Haryana using the Sports Competition Anxiety Test (SCAT). The sample ($n = 80$) and group-comparison design showed that lower-achieving teams displayed higher competitive anxiety than higher-achieving teams, suggesting that anxiety levels relate inversely to performance outcomes. The study highlights local dynamics (team status, performance expectations) as important determinants of anxiety among young female athletes in Haryana and underscores the value of routine anxiety screening in university and district-level programs.

Wazir Singh's (2014) district-level investigation of school-age cricket players in Bhiwani (Haryana) measured pre-competition anxiety using the SCAT and compared high-performing and low-performing teams (U-19 sample, $n \approx 96$). Results indicated that (a) teams with moderate anxiety tended to perform better than extremely low or very high anxious teams, and (b) high-performing teams often show a more stable/moderate anxiety profile before matches. This study is useful for understanding **optimal anxiety (inverted-U/zone of optimal functioning)** dynamics in Haryana youth sport and suggests that interventions should aim to regulate—not entirely eliminate—pre-competition arousal. The district focus (Bhiwani) provides directly relevant empirical evidence for your Haryana thesis chapter on determinants and performance outcomes.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify key psychological factors affecting performance anxiety.
- To analyse their impact on athletic performance.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based exclusively on secondary data. The nature of the data is descriptive and analytical, focusing on existing empirical and theoretical work related to performance anxiety, sports psychology, and the socio-cultural context of Haryana. The scope of secondary data encompasses national and international research on young athletes, with a specific emphasis on psychological variables such as self-esteem, motivation, perfectionism, coping strategies, parental pressure, and coach–athlete relationships. Data were collected from peer-reviewed

journals, published reports of sports authorities, government documents, and sports psychology textbooks. Relevant literature was identified using academic databases, institutional repositories, and official federation websites. The collected material was then systematically reviewed, categorised, and thematically analysed to identify key psychological determinants and patterns related to performance anxiety among young athletes. The synthesis of these secondary sources provided a comprehensive conceptual framework and contextual understanding, despite the absence of primary field-based data collection.

Theoretical Models of Performance Anxiety

The understanding of performance anxiety in sport has been shaped by several theoretical models that explain how cognitive and physiological processes interact to affect athletic performance.

i. Multidimensional Anxiety Theory

Multidimensional Anxiety Theory is a sports psychology model developed in the 1980s, which proposes that anxiety is composed of two distinct components: cognitive anxiety and somatic anxiety. According to the theory, **cognitive anxiety** (worry, negative thoughts) has a **negative linear** relationship with performance, meaning performance declines as cognitive anxiety increases. In contrast, **somatic anxiety** (physiological arousal) follows an **inverted-U pattern**, where moderate arousal enhances performance but excessive arousal leads to deterioration. This model, developed based on competitive settings, emphasises that each anxiety component influences performance differently (Gould & Weinberg, 2019).

ii. Catastrophe Theory

Another important framework is the Catastrophe Theory, which expands on the multidimensional model by introducing the concept of a sudden and dramatic performance breakdown. According to this theory, performance depends on the interaction between **cognitive anxiety** and **physiological arousal**. When cognitive anxiety is **low**, arousal follows an inverted-U curve. However, when cognitive anxiety is **high**, increased arousal can push an athlete past a critical threshold, resulting in a **catastrophic drop** in performance. Recovery from this drop requires a substantial reduction in both arousal and anxiety levels, highlighting the nonlinear and fragile nature of performance under pressure (Hardy, 1996).

Psychological Factors Influencing Performance Anxiety of Young Athletes in Haryana

Self-Esteem and Confidence

Self-esteem reflects a person's overall sense of self-worth, while self-confidence refers to belief in one's ability to perform specific tasks. Individuals with low self-esteem often interpret performance situations as threatening, fear negative evaluation, and expect failure, leading to increased anxiety. High confidence, on the other hand, reduces worry and enhances focus. Research shows that self-esteem moderates the relationship between stress and performance anxiety—low self-esteem athletes and students are more prone to anxiety under evaluative pressure.

Motivation (Intrinsic and Extrinsic)

Intrinsic motivation (internal desire for mastery, enjoyment, growth) typically reduces performance anxiety because the person feels internally driven rather than pressured. Extrinsic motivation (rewards, recognition, approval) may increase anxiety when individuals feel controlled or judged by others. Studies show that athletes driven mainly by external rewards show higher competitive anxiety than those motivated intrinsically.

Coping Strategies and Emotional Regulation

The ability to manage emotions before and during performance plays a major role in anxiety levels. Individuals who employ adaptive coping strategies—such as cognitive reappraisal, mindfulness, positive self-talk, or problem-focused planning—experience lower anxiety and improved performance. Maladaptive coping, including avoidance, rumination, and suppression, strongly predicts high performance anxiety.

Parental Expectations and Pressure

Parental pressure—whether through high expectations, criticism, or conditional approval—can heighten performance anxiety in children, adolescents, and young athletes. Over-involved or overly demanding parents increase fear of failure and worry about disappointing the family. Conversely, supportive parenting lowers fear and strengthens confidence.

Coach–Athlete Relationship

The quality of the coach–athlete relationship influences emotional security during training and competition. Autonomy-supportive coaches foster competence and confidence, reducing anxiety. In contrast, controlling or overly critical coaches increase athletes' worries, self-doubt, and fear of punishment or evaluation. Research shows that supportive coaching improves coping and reduces competitive anxiety.

Peer Comparison and Social Judgment

Performance anxiety often increases in social-evaluative contexts where individuals compare themselves with

peers. A fear of being judged, ridiculed, or perceived as inferior heightens stress responses. Adolescents and performers in group environments (sports teams, music ensembles, classrooms) are especially vulnerable to peer-based anxiety.

Personality Traits (e.g., Neuroticism, Perfectionism)

Certain personality traits predispose individuals to greater performance anxiety:

- i. Neuroticism: Linked with emotional instability, worry, and sensitivity to stress. High-neuroticism individuals are more reactive to evaluative threats.
- ii. Perfectionism: Particularly *perfectionistic concerns* (fear of mistakes, self-criticism) predict high anxiety and poor coping.
- iii. Trait Anxiety: Stable tendency to experience anxiety across situations.

Meta-analyses show that maladaptive perfectionism and neuroticism are major predictors of performance anxiety in sports, academics, and arts (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985; Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

Stress Management Skills

Individuals with weak stress-management abilities (poor relaxation skills, time pressure coping, or lack of breathing control) experience higher physiological arousal, which can trigger or worsen performance anxiety. Training in stress-management techniques—such as breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, and cognitive restructuring—significantly reduces anxiety (Smith, 1980; Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

Goal Orientation (Outcome vs. Task-focused)

Goal orientation strongly influences how performers interpret success and failure:

- i. Outcome-oriented individuals focus on winning, ranking, or outperforming others. This increases anxiety, especially when outcomes feel uncontrollable.
- ii. Task-oriented individuals focus on improvement, mastery, and effort. This reduces anxiety by shifting attention from evaluation to personal growth.

Research consistently shows that task-focused athletes and students experience less performance anxiety and perform more consistently under pressure.

Socio-Cultural Context of Haryana

The socio-cultural environment of Haryana plays a crucial role in shaping the psychological experiences of young

athletes and performers. Factors such as the state's competitive sports culture, entrenched gender norms, and rural–urban distinctions influence how individuals perceive pressure, success, and failure.

Competitive Sports Culture in Haryana

Haryana is widely regarded as one of India's strongest sporting states, known for producing Olympic and international medalists in wrestling, boxing, athletics, kabaddi, and shooting. This long-standing sporting tradition is rooted in rural physical culture, including *akhadas* (wrestling arenas), youth sports competitions, and community-sponsored training camps. Because sports success is associated with prestige, honour, and upward mobility, families often encourage children to pursue athletic training from a young age. The state government's generous policies—cash rewards, government jobs, and infrastructural support—further solidify sports as a viable career option.

However, this strong sports ecosystem also generates intense psychological pressure. Athletes frequently compare themselves with high-performing peers and local role models such as the Phogat sisters, Neeraj Chopra, Bajrang Punia, and Sakshi Malik. The expectation to maintain Haryana's reputation for excellence leads to heightened performance anxiety, particularly among young athletes who fear disappointing their families or losing community respect. Thus, while the sports culture of Haryana is empowering, it simultaneously fosters a high-pressure environment where success becomes closely tied to identity and self-worth.

Gender Norms and Societal Expectations

Haryana has traditionally been a patriarchal society, where gender norms influence participation in sports and public life. While the state has made notable progress in female empowerment—especially due to the visibility of successful women athletes—girls still encounter significant socio-cultural constraints. These include concerns about safety, limited mobility, restrictions on attire, and expectations related to household duties. As a result, girls often feel pressure to justify their involvement in sports, leading to heightened anxiety about meeting performance standards or proving their capability.

On the other hand, boys face pressure rooted in masculinity norms that emphasise strength, stamina, aggression, and winning. Failure is often equated with weakness, making it emotionally difficult for male athletes to express vulnerability or seek psychological help. For both genders, societal expectations shape not just participation but also emotional experience: girls struggle with external scrutiny and restrictive norms, while boys

grapple with internalised ideals of toughness and dominance. These gendered patterns create differentiated yet equally significant psychological stressors for athletes across the state.

Rural vs. Urban Differences in Psychological Pressure

Haryana's rural and urban environments differ substantially in terms of sports culture, opportunities, and psychological demands. In rural areas, sports are deeply embedded in community life, and athletes often train collectively in village arenas. Community pride plays a major role—success brings honour not only to the individual but to the entire village. This collective pride can be motivating but also creates strong pressure to succeed, as failure is socially visible and widely discussed. Rural athletes may also experience limited access to sports psychologists, modern training systems, and professional coaching, which intensifies anxiety about competition.

Urban athletes, by contrast, typically have access to better facilities, a wider range of sports options, and professional support systems. However, they often face performance pressure from multiple fronts—academic expectations, competitive school environments, and parental aspirations for holistic success. Urban settings also involve greater peer comparison due to larger talent pools and exposure to national-level competitions. While rural athletes are more affected by community-driven pressure, urban athletes deal with individualistic pressure linked to self-achievement and future career prospects.

IV. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Interventions to Reduce Performance Anxiety

Reducing performance anxiety among young athletes in Haryana requires a multi-level approach that addresses individual, social, and structural factors. Psychological counselling services should be made accessible in training academies, schools, and sports centres to help athletes understand and manage anxiety triggers. Regular workshops on stress reduction, healthy coping mechanisms, and emotional awareness can help athletes build resilience. Relaxation-based interventions, such as deep breathing, meditation, guided imagery, and progressive muscle relaxation, should be integrated into pre-competition routines. Coaches and parents must be sensitised to avoid punitive or excessively critical behaviour, and instead adopt a supportive, growth-oriented approach that reduces the fear of failure. Creating a non-judgmental team environment in which mistakes are viewed as part of the learning process can significantly reduce performance pressure.

2. Psychological Skill Training Modules

Introducing structured **Psychological Skill Training (PST)** modules is essential for improving mental readiness. PST programs should include components such as self-talk regulation, goal-setting techniques, visualisation, attentional control, and emotional regulation exercises. Training modules may be delivered by certified sports psychologists or trained coaches who understand the unique socio-cultural context of Haryana. Sessions can be conducted weekly and integrated into regular practice schedules. Young athletes should be taught how to develop pre-performance routines, manage internal distractions, and shift from outcome-based to process-based thinking. Over time, these modules help athletes build long-term confidence, increase intrinsic motivation, and enhance overall mental toughness. Regular assessment of athletes' psychological skills can further guide personalised interventions.

3. Policy and Institutional Suggestions

At the systemic level, policy measures are necessary to institutionalise psychological well-being within Haryana's sports ecosystem. Sports institutions—such as state sports departments, academies, and athletic federations—should mandate the presence of trained sports psychologists in all district and state-level training centres. Policies must encourage a balanced athlete development model that prioritises mental health alongside physical training. Government schemes should include funding for mental-skills workshops, coach education programs, and parent-awareness initiatives. Schools and colleges should integrate sports psychology into physical education curricula to normalise discussions around anxiety and stress. Furthermore, talent academies in both rural and urban areas should establish athlete monitoring systems that regularly track psychological indicators, such as stress levels, motivation, and risk of burnout. Ensuring gender-sensitive policies—especially for female athletes—will help address socio-cultural barriers and create safer, more inclusive spaces for performance development.

V. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that performance anxiety among young athletes in Haryana is shaped by a complex interplay of psychological determinants and socio-cultural influences that extend far beyond the playing field. The review of literature highlights that factors such as self-esteem, motivation, coping strategies, perfectionism, parental expectations, and the coach–athlete relationship significantly influence how athletes experience pressure during training and competitions. Haryana's unique sports

culture—characterised by high competitiveness, strong community pride, and the presence of successful role models—creates both motivating and high-pressure environments for young athletes. Gender norms further compound psychological challenges, especially for girls who often navigate restrictive expectations and reduced autonomy. Additionally, rural athletes face community-driven pressure and limited psychological support, while urban athletes encounter performance demands from academics and elite sports pathways. These insights underline the importance of integrating psychological preparedness into sports development programs. For the future of sports performance in Haryana, addressing these determinants is crucial for developing mentally resilient athletes who can sustain long-term excellence without experiencing burnout or anxiety-related setbacks. Ensuring that psychological training receives equal emphasis as physical conditioning will not only enhance competitive outcomes but also promote holistic well-being. Therefore, Haryana's sports ecosystem must adopt a comprehensive approach—encompassing policy support, institutional reforms, and community awareness—to effectively manage performance anxiety and empower young athletes to perform confidently and consistently at higher levels.

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