

A Comparative Study of Happiness among Male and Female Athlete Students in University of Tehran

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine and compare the level of happiness among male and female athlete students in Tehran University. The total number of 282 students (144 female and 138 male athletes) from Tehran University completed the Oxford Happiness questionnaire containing measures of study variables, validated inside the country. After distributing and collecting the questionnaires among the subjects, independent sample t-test and SPSS.11 software showed that female athletes of Tehran University had reported higher physical health, positive cognition, self- efficacy, happiness and life satisfaction than male participants. Even though both groups benefited a same level of self-esteem, but on the whole the rate of happiness among female athlete students was higher.

Key words: Athlete % University student % Happiness and its related factors

INTRODUCTION

One of the main paths in psychology is to determine the meaning and indexes of mental diseases and mental health. Nowadays, mental diseases are regarded as one of the most important aspects in the social health. Due to the physicians' opinions, more than fifty percent of physical illnesses have mental origin. It is also estimated that one person out of twelve, may spend his/her life in the mental hospitals [1]. However, investigations and researches in psychology and sport shows that sports and physical activities are one of the best ways to prevent mental diseases. According to scientific researches [2] people with good physical fitness are stronger in confronting excitements, anxiety and doing physical activities with the least changes in life. In the other hand, the rate of suffering from mental diseases is less among athletes and fit people in compare with non-athletes.

On the bases of opinions made by psychiatrists and the experts of International Association for Mental Health, sports and physical activity have positive effect on the subjective well-being, happiness and individual health. Furthermore, the scientific studies proved the positive relation between doing physical activities with satisfaction and body concept [2]. Satisfaction from participating in physical activities will bring joy and life

satisfaction, which may extend this feeling to other domains in the life [2].

It was revealed in a study that aerobic physical activities had meaningful effect on increasing the rate of happiness and mental health [3]. Another study also investigated the effects of aerobic trainings on psychological characteristics and concluded that after aerobic physical activities, depression had decreased and the rate of happiness and life satisfaction had increased in the subjects of study [4]. It was concluded from other researches that athletes in Track and Field (an aerobic sport) experienced less depression and anxiety in life and they advantage higher life satisfaction [5]. In another study, researchers investigated the effects of anaerobic physical activities on psychological characteristics and concluded that intense physical activities, improve subject's manner and behavior, decrease depression and stress and increase their self-esteem [6]. The results of one study on the psychological advantages of intense physical activities had showed that this kind of training, decrease depression, stress and anxiety in the life and increase self-respect among the participants [7].

According to the mentioned studies, it is clear that physical activities have positive affect on psychological characteristics. However, there are many difference of opinion on the sport disciplines

with the rate of their effectiveness. In the other hand and pointing to the psychological and physical differences between male and female, it seems possible that the effects of physical activities on psychological characteristics and the rate of happiness in both groups could not be the same. As a matter of fact, in this study, researchers investigated and compared the rate of happiness among male and female athlete students of Tehran University.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This descriptive study was conducted based on the field research. All the male and female athletes from Tehran University composed the statistical population of this research and the subjects were the one, who had participated in University Student's Olympiad inside the country, held in Isfahan – summer 2004. According to the last statistics of Physical Education Department in the University, this population

consists of 144 male and 138 female athletes. For collecting information, two parted questionnaire was used; the first part was designed to assess the personal characteristics and the second part was Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ). The validity and reliability of this questionnaire was examined inside the country with $r = 93\%$ [8]. The 29-item OHQ with four possible answers, questioned about physical health, positive cognition, self- efficacy, self-esteem, life satisfaction and the happiness of subjects. After distributing and collecting the questionnaire for statistical analyzing, researchers used independent sample t-test and SPSS.11 software.

RESULTS

The results of this test (Table 1 and Figures 1-6) shows significance differences in life satisfaction ($p = 0.001$), self-efficacy ($p = 0.001$), positive cognition ($p = 0.001$), physical health ($p = 0.001$) and the rate of

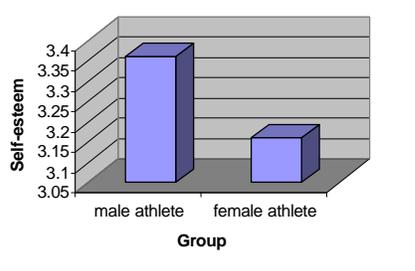


Fig. 1: The comparison of self-esteem in male & female athletes

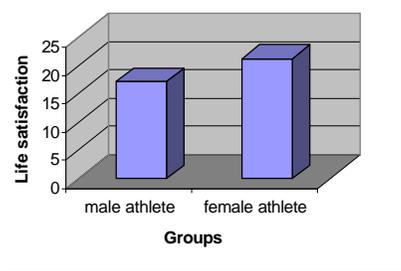


Fig. 2: The comparison of life satisfaction in male & female athletes

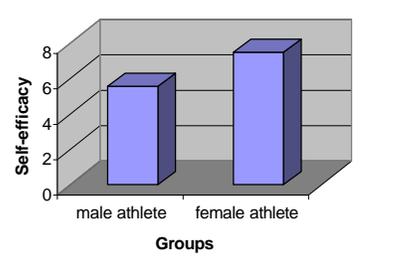


Fig. 3: The comparison of self-efficacy in male & female athletes

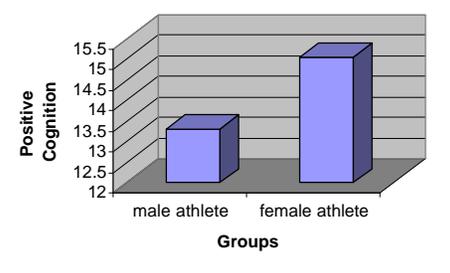


Fig. 4: The comparison of positive cognition in male & female athletes

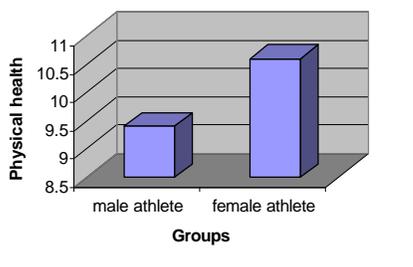


Fig. 5: The comparison of physical health in male & female athletes

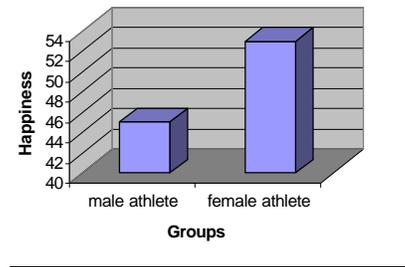


Fig. 6: The comparison of happiness in male & female athletes

Table 1: The comparison of psychological characteristics in male and female athletes

Psychological Characteristics	Mean		SD		P-value
	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Self-esteem	3.16	3.36	1.75	1.58	0.325
Life satisfaction	21.29	17.74	5.90	5.65	0.001 *
Self-efficacy	7.46	5.57	2.17	2.01	0.001 *
Positive cognition	15.06	13.31	3.73	4.59	0.001 *
Physical Health	10.59	9.40	3.11	2.72	0.001 *
Happiness	53.02	45.04	13.24	11.70	0.001 *

*Significant differences $p < 0.001$

happiness ($p = 0.001$) between male and female athletes in Tehran University in which female athletes advantaged better psychological characteristics, including physical health, positive cognition, self- efficacy, happiness and life satisfaction. Regarding the self-esteem of both groups, there was no significant difference ($p = 0.325$).

DISCUSSION

Final Evaluations on the Results of this Research Showed

That: the rate of self-esteem in male and female athlete students is in the same level. This means that being athlete or doing physical activities have same effects in both genders. Mac Mahan (1994) had studied the psychological advantages of physical activities and achieved the same result [7]. The effect of physical activities on the rate of self-esteem in his study among male and female groups was also the same [7]. In another study Merns (1996) showed that physical activities affect the rate of self-esteem in women more than men. This researcher believes that, women carry more psychological-spiritual problems in their minds before participating in physical activities and this fact could be the reason for these differences [8]. The most important point in many studies made by different researchers is the positive effects of physical activities in improving the self-esteem of all the participants, both male & females [9-12].

There are also significant differences between physical health, positive cognition, self- efficacy, happiness and life satisfaction among male and female athletes of Tehran University, in which female athletes reported better physical health, positive cognition, self- efficacy, happiness and life satisfaction than male participants. Studies of Merns (1996) confirm this result. In his studies, female advantage physical activities more than male participants and the positive psychological characteristics had improved in their lives, more than the other group [8].

In another physical-psychological study on women, researchers showed that physical activities affect women's behavior and temper, decrease their stress and anxiety and also increase women's self-esteem [6].

Clapp *et al.* (1999) assert that physical activities affect people's temper and behavior in two direct ways. First one is the release of endorphin and the second one is the reduction of cortisol – this hormone will be resealed in the blood after nervous and mental pressure [14]. According to human physiologists, endorphins are natural medications for reducing pain in the body and they also bring good feelings. What is more interesting is the role of physical activities in increasing the secretion of endorphin in the blood. Other researchers had also proven that proper physical activities increase the level of serotonin in blood – which is an effective hormone in improving tempers and behavior [14]. Regarding the mentioned studies, it seems possible that physical activities increases the levels of endorphin and serotonin and save them in the blood for longer period during the training sessions [13].

CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the positive effect of physical activities on the rate of happiness among male and female participants in proper exercises. What is more interesting (as it was showed in this study) is the effect of physical activities on female athlete more than male participants.

Further research should identify the reasons for gender differences in such case, with laboratory and careful studies. Consideration should be given to male participants in physical activities to improve their psychological characteristics and mental health during physical exercises (Table 1).

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