

Fear of Success as a Psychological Predictor of Rumination and Depressive Tendencies among Kabaddi Players

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Abstract

The present study investigated the relationships among fear of success, rumination, and depression among national-level male Kabaddi players in Sonipat, Haryana. Despite the physical demands of competitive sports, psychological factors such as fear of success may significantly impact cognitive and emotional functioning in athletes. A total of 50 male Kabaddi players aged 21–25 years from Nir Guliya Kabaddi Academy participated in the study. Data were collected using standardized instruments: The Fear of Success Scale (FOSS), the Rumination-Reflection Questionnaire (RRQ), and the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II). Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, and simple linear regression to examine relationships and predictive effects among the variables. Results indicated weak and non-significant correlations between fear of success, rumination, and depression ($p > 0.05$), and regression analyses showed that fear of success had minimal predictive contribution to rumination and depression. These findings suggest that, within this sample, fear of success may not be a strong determinant of negative cognitive or emotional outcomes. Nevertheless, the study highlights the importance of considering psychological constructs in athlete development and emphasizes the need for mental health support and cognitive coping strategies in competitive sports. Implications for coaching and sports psychology interventions are discussed.

Keywords: Fear of Success, Rumination, Depression, Kabaddi Players, Predictive Study

INTRODUCTION

Sports performance is increasingly acknowledged not just as a matter of physical ability and technical skill, but as a dynamic interaction between physical conditioning and psychological functioning. In high-performance sports, psychological variables such as motivation, emotional regulation, coping strategies, and cognitive style are often decisive determinants of both success and well-being (Gould & Maynard, 2009). Among these, a less explored but potentially critical barrier is the phenomenon commonly referred to as fear of success (FoS). This construct refers to the apprehension or anxiety that achievement may lead to undesirable consequences—such as increased social pressure, unrealistic expectations, or loss of personal freedom—rather than purely positive outcomes (Singh & Aggarwal,

2007; Kets de Vries, 1997). Athletes experiencing FoS may engage in avoidance behaviors, self-sabotage, or develop negative cognitive patterns that undermine their performance and mental health.

A relevant cognitive-behavioral mechanism that may mediate the impact of fear of success on mental health is rumination. Rumination is conceptualized as a repetitive and passive focus on one's emotional distress, its causes, and its consequences (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). Numerous studies in non-athletic populations have identified rumination as a robust predictor of depressive symptoms, prolongation of emotional distress, and poor mental health outcomes (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1993; Smith & Alloy, 2009). In the context of sports, the high-pressure environment, performance expectations, and potential social scrutiny make athletes susceptible to rumination. Particularly in dynamic, contact, or team sports, athletes may repeatedly replay mistakes, worry about future performance, or anticipate negative social evaluation, thereby increasing their risk for emotional difficulties.

Notably, recent research in sport psychology has begun to highlight the detrimental role of repetitive negative thinking (RNT)—a category that includes rumination and worry—in athletes' mental health. In a study of 263 athletes across different sports, higher levels of RNT were significantly associated with greater cognitive and somatic components of competition anxiety, suggesting that repetitive thinking contributes to psychological distress in athletes (Raalte et al., 2021). Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a study among semiprofessional football players reported that negative self-compassion and repetitive thinking were associated with depressive mood and fear of the future, emphasizing the vulnerability of athletes to mental health disturbances under stress (Jansen et al., 2021).

Moreover, recent work underscores that broader cognitive and personality constructs—such as irrational beliefs, perfectionism, or stress mindset—are closely intertwined with fear of failure and may have implications for mental health in athletes. For instance, irrational beliefs and perfectionistic tendencies have been linked to increased risk of depression and burnout among athletes, highlighting how maladaptive cognitions may exacerbate vulnerability in high-pressure sport environments (Turner & Moore, 2022; systematic reviews 2025). A study published in 2025 found that mental toughness, sport imagery, and anxiety significantly influence athletic performance and well-being, drawing attention to the psychological complexity of elite sport beyond just physical training. These findings lend support to the notion that cognitive and emotional regulation, stress appraisal, and coping mechanisms are critical for sustaining performance and mental health in athletes.

Despite this growing evidence in sports generally, there remains a paucity of empirical research focusing specifically on contact sports such as Kabaddi, especially in the Indian context. Contact and traditional sports like Kabaddi involve distinctive physical intensity, aggressive play, social expectations, and cultural pressures — all of which may amplify the psychological demands on players. This gap becomes more salient when considering that many existing studies prioritize individual, non-contact sports or Western athlete populations, limiting their applicability to Indian contact-sport athletes.

Given this background, the present study aims to integrate the constructs of fear of success, rumination, and depression among national-level male players of Kabaddi in Sonipat, Haryana. Specifically, the study investigates whether fear of success predicts rumination, and whether both fear of success and rumination are associated with depressive symptoms. By doing so, the study seeks to clarify whether fear of success acts as a precursor to negative cognitive patterns (rumination) that may lead to mood disturbances — a conceptual framework depicted as follows:

Fear of Success → Rumination → Depression

This model draws on theoretical perspectives from psychoanalytic (fear-based achievement anxiety), soc-

ial-cognitive (anticipatory anxiety and self-evaluation), and cognitive-behavioral frameworks (rumination as maladaptive cognitive style). Understanding these relationships is critical for designing targeted psychological interventions. If fear of success indeed precedes rumination and depressive symptoms, then early intervention focusing on cognitive restructuring, stress mindset, and emotion regulation could benefit athletes not only in terms of performance but also long-term mental health.

Therefore, this study addresses a significant gap in sports psychology literature by focusing on a culturally relevant, physically demanding sport in India and investigating under-explored psychological constructs. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for coaches, sports psychologists, and physical educators to develop context-sensitive mental health support programs, promote adaptive cognition, and integrate mental skills training into athletic preparation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study adopts a predictive research design. A survey method will be employed to examine the relationship between the independent variable, fear of success, and the dependent variables, rumination and depression, among Kabaddi players. The study aims to explore whether fear of success serves as a predictor of rumination and depressive symptoms in a competitive athletic population.

Participants

The population for the study consists of male Kabaddi players from Nir Guliya Kabaddi Academy, Sonipat, Haryana. Due to the relatively small population size, a census sampling method will be used, collecting data from the entire population. The age of participants ranges from 21 to 25 years. A total of 50 male Kabaddi players will constitute the sample for this research.

Tools/Instruments

1. Fear of Success: The Fear of Success Scale (FOSS) developed by Zucker, Maher, and Allison (1976) will be used to assess fear of success among athletes. This scale measures achievement-related anxiety and anticipatory fears associated with success.
2. Rumination: The Rumination-Reflection Questionnaire (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999) will be employed to measure the tendency to engage in repetitive, self-focused thinking.
3. Depression: Depressive symptoms will be assessed using the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) (Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996), a widely used instrument for measuring the severity of depression.

Statistical Techniques

Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and standard error of the mean, will be calculated to summarize the data. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation will be used to examine the relationships between fear of success, rumination, and depression. To determine the predictive influence of fear of success on rumination and depression, simple linear regression analyses will be conducted. All hypotheses will be tested at the 0.05 level of significance. Regression equations will be formulated to quantify the predictive relationships among the variables.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The data were analyzed using Mean, Standard Deviation (SD), Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, and Simple Linear Regression. Prior to the main analysis, the normality of the data was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Although slight deviations from normality were observed in some variables, these deviations were not statistically significant. Therefore, parametric statistical tests were applied for

further analysis.

Table 1 presents the correlation between fear of success, rumination and depression

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Fear of Success	Rumination	Depression
Fear of Success	50	108.18	9.44	--	0.175 (P-0.113)	-0.138 (P-0.170)
Rumination	50	69.64	4.91	0.175 (P-0.113)	--	-0.069 (P-0.317)
Depression	50	25.64	7.50	-0.138 (P-0.170)	-0.069 (P-0.317)	--

Table 1 shows the relationships among fear of success, rumination, and depression among national-level male Kabaddi players of Nir Guliya Kabaddi Academy, Sonipat, Haryana. The correlation between fear of success and rumination is weakly positive ($r = 0.175$), but the p-value (0.113) exceeds the 0.05 significance level. This indicates that the relationship is not statistically significant, and the null hypothesis of no significant relationship is accepted. The correlation between fear of success and depression is weakly negative ($r = -0.138$), with a p-value of 0.170, which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, this relationship is not statistically significant, and the null hypothesis is accepted. The correlation between rumination and depression is very weakly negative ($r = -0.069$), with a p-value of 0.317, indicating no statistical significance. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 2 shows the regression summary of the three models viz., fear of success, rumination and depression

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
Rumination and Fear of Success	0.175	0.030	0.010	9.39
Depression and Fear of Success	0.138	0.019	0.020	9.44
Depression and Rumination	-0.069	0.005	0.016	4.95

The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.030$) indicates that rumination accounts for only 3% of the variance in fear of success, which is negligible. The R^2 value of 0.019 shows that depression explains only 2% of the variance in fear of success, reflecting a very weak explanatory effect. The R^2 value of 0.005 indicates that depression accounts for only about 0.5% (approximately 1%) of the variance in rumination, which is trivial.

Table 3 presents the ANOVA Summaries

Model	Source of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Rumination and Fear of Success	Regression	133.106	1	133.106	1.509	0.225
	Residual	4234.274	48	88.214		
	Total	4367.380	49			
Fear of Success and Depression	Regression	82.65	1	82.65	0.926	0.341
	Residual	4284.72	48	89.26		
	Total	4367.38	49			
	Regression	5.61	1	5.61	0.228	0.635

Rumination and Depression	Residual	1179.90	48	24.58		
	Total	1185.52	49			

The regression analysis revealed that rumination did not significantly predict fear of success, as the obtained F value, $F(1, 48) = 1.509$, with a p-value of 0.225, was greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the regression model was not statistically significant.

Similarly, depression failed to significantly predict fear of success. The regression result showed $F(1, 48) = 0.926$ with a p-value of 0.341, which exceeds the 0.05 significance level, indicating that the model was not statistically significant.

Furthermore, depression did not significantly predict rumination among the players, as reflected by $F(1, 48) = 0.228$ and a p-value of 0.635, which is also greater than 0.05. Hence, this regression model was not statistically significant.

Overall, the regression analyses indicate that neither rumination nor depression significantly predicts fear of success, and depression also does not significantly predict rumination among the national-level male Kabaddi players.

Figure 1 illustrates the scatter plot depicting the relationship between fear of success and rumination.

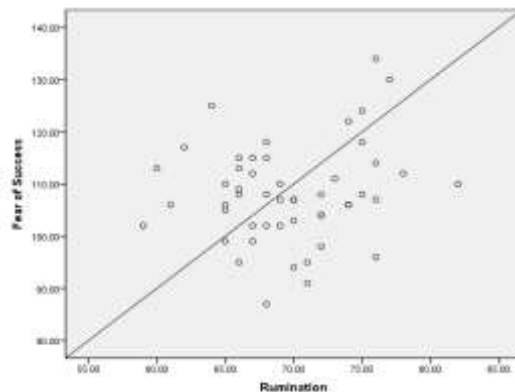


Figure 2 illustrates the scatter plot depicting the relationship between fear of success and depression.

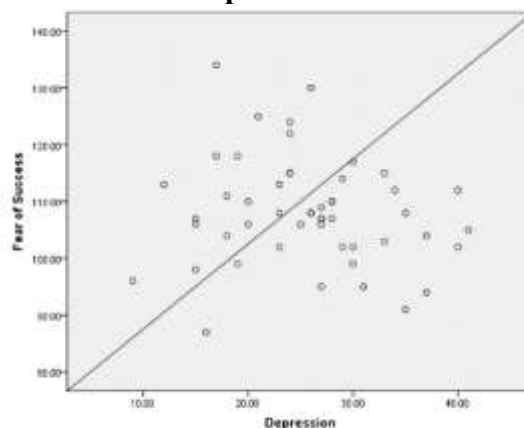
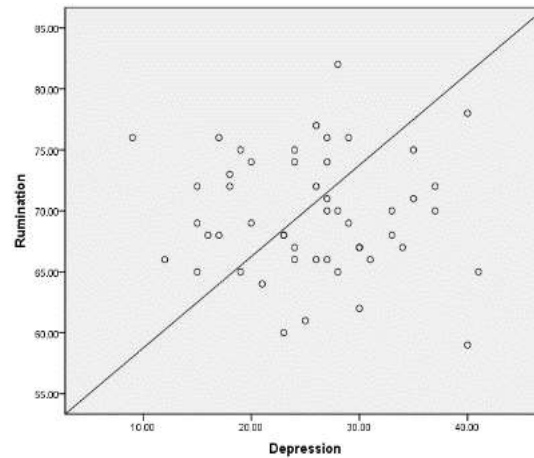


Figure 3 illustrates the scatter plot depicting the relationship between rumination and depression.



DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationships among fear of success, rumination, and depression, and to assess the predictive influence of rumination and depression on fear of success among national-level male Kabaddi players of Nir Guliya Kabaddi Academy, Sonipat, Haryana. Contrary to expectations and theoretical assumptions in sport psychology, the results of the study revealed no significant correlations among the three psychological variables. Furthermore, the regression analyses demonstrated that rumination and depression did not significantly predict fear of success, explaining only a very small proportion (1–3%) of the variance.

Fear of Success and Rumination

Although a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.175$) was observed between fear of success and rumination, this relationship was not statistically significant. Theoretically, athletes who struggle with fear of success may engage in repetitive negative thinking, anticipating potential negative outcomes such as increased expectations, pressure, or criticism. However, the lack of significant association in this sample suggests that Kabaddi players may not perceive achievement-related consequences as threatening enough to trigger rumination, or they may possess psychological coping strategies that reduce repetitive negative thinking even when fear of success is present.

Fear of Success and Depression

The correlation between fear of success and depression was weakly negative ($r = -0.138$) and statistically insignificant. This finding indicates that players who experience anxiety related to achievement are not necessarily more prone to depressive symptoms. It is possible that for athletes in structured training environments, achievement-related fears might be mitigated by factors such as strong team support, regular competitive exposure, high physical activity levels (which buffer depression), coaching strategies that emphasize resilience and performance focus. These protective factors may prevent the development of depressive symptoms even among those who experience fear of success.

Rumination and Depression

While existing literature frequently links rumination to depression, the present study found no significant relationship ($r = -0.069$). This result may be influenced by characteristics specific to Kabaddi players, such as physical conditioning, mental toughness, and the culturally embedded value of perseverance in

competitive sports. Athletes often channel negative thoughts into performance goals, which may reduce the impact of rumination on emotional well-being.

Predictive Analyses

Regression models revealed that neither rumination nor depression significantly predicted fear of success. The very low R^2 values (0.030, 0.019, and 0.005) indicate that only 1–3% of the variation in the dependent variables was explained, the psychological variables in this study operated largely independently, External factors not measured in the study—such as personality traits, coping mechanisms, social support, competitive experience, coaching climate, and motivation—may play a more dominant role.

These findings highlight the complexity of psychological functioning in athletes. Unlike general populations, athletes' mental processes are influenced by sport-specific culture, training demands, and performance expectations.

Several factors may explain the absence of significant relationships among fear of success, rumination, and depression in this study. The sample was relatively homogeneous, as all participants trained at the same academy, which may have limited variability in psychological responses. Additionally, high levels of physical activity and training likely provided a buffering effect against stress and negative thinking. The age range of 21–25 years, coupled with national-level competitive experience, may have contributed to greater resilience and adaptive coping strategies. Finally, the cultural context in Haryana, which emphasizes mental toughness and performance identity in sports, may have further minimized the influence of emotional and cognitive variables.

Overall, the study suggests that fear of success, rumination, and depression did not show significant relationships, and none of the variables predicted one another among the Kabaddi players. While psychological constructs are important, the present findings indicate that other factors may play a stronger role in shaping athletes' mental functioning. Future studies should consider larger sample sizes, diverse sporting environments, and additional psychological predictors such as motivation, self-esteem, coping styles, and perceived pressure.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationships among fear of success, rumination, and depression, and explored the predictive role of these psychological variables among national-level male Kabaddi players of Nir Guliya Kabaddi Academy, Sonipat, Haryana. The findings revealed no significant relationships between fear of success and rumination, fear of success and depression, or rumination and depression. Regression analyses further indicated that rumination and depression did not significantly predict fear of success, and depression did not significantly predict rumination. The very low variance explained in all regression models (1–3%) suggests that these psychological constructs function largely independently within this athletic population.

Several factors may explain these non-significant relationships. First, the sample was relatively homogeneous, as all participants trained in the same academy and shared similar coaching, routines, and competitive exposure, which may have limited variability in psychological responses. Second, the high levels of physical activity inherent to Kabaddi may provide a buffering effect against stress, rumination, and depressive tendencies (de la Vega, Ruiz, & Ávila-Parra, 2017). Third, the age range of 21–25 years, along with national-level competitive experience, may contribute to greater resilience and adaptive coping strategies. Finally, the cultural context in Haryana emphasizes mental toughness and a strong performance

identity, potentially minimizing the influence of fear-based cognition or rumination on depression. These interpretations are supported by prior research. Roy and Memmert (2016) found that professional team-sport athletes tend to exhibit lower levels of rumination than non-athletes, suggesting that athletes in dynamic, high-intensity sports may naturally engage in fewer maladaptive cognitive patterns. De la Vega et al. (2017) demonstrated that dispositional mindfulness and emotion regulation can buffer the negative effects of rumination on coping among elite athletes, highlighting the role of psychological resilience as a protective factor. Jansen, Hoja, and Meneghetti (2021) reported that repetitive negative thinking, including rumination, is associated with competitive anxiety, but the effect depends on contextual variables such as stress exposure and sport type. Additionally, Kaluza, Beckmann, and Ehrlenspiel (2019) emphasized that individual differences in cognitive orientation influence rumination tendencies, suggesting that personal and situational factors moderate the relationship between negative thinking and emotional outcomes. Taken together, these findings suggest that national-level Kabaddi players may possess protective psychological traits and coping mechanisms that reduce the impact of fear of success and rumination on depressive symptoms. Structured training, high physical fitness, exposure to competitive stress, and a supportive cultural environment likely contribute to this resilience. While theoretical models often predict interdependence between fear-based cognition, rumination, and depression, the present study highlights that contextual and sport-specific factors can moderate these relationships, leading to weak or non-significant associations.

In conclusion, within this sample, fear of success was not a significant predictor of rumination or depression, and rumination did not significantly predict depression. These results underscore the importance of considering athlete-specific factors, such as training environment, physical conditioning, and resilience, when examining psychological constructs in competitive sports. Future research should investigate larger, more diverse samples across different sports and competitive levels, and consider additional variables such as stress, anxiety, and coping strategies to provide a more comprehensive understanding of mental health and cognitive-emotional dynamics in athletes.

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