

Gender Differences in Mental Toughness Among Football Players of Dhanamanjuri University, Manipur

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mental toughness, which reflects a person's spirit and confidence, significantly predicts success in sports, academics, and the workplace (Clough et al., 2002). This concept originated in sports training and encompasses a range of traits that enable individuals to excel as athletes. It allows them to confront challenging training and competition while maintaining their confidence. In recent decades, corporate executives, sports psychologists, coaches, and sports commentators have widely employed the word. Generally speaking, "mental toughness" refers to any positive trait that allows a person to cope with difficult situations. Researchers from various scientific disciplines focus on competitive sports to identify the different factors that affect them. Sports scientists assert that multiple factors influence an athlete's optimal execution and performance. Coaches and sports analysts often use the term "mental toughness" to describe the mindset of athletes who persist through challenging sports situations to achieve success (Jones & Taylor, 2018). For example, it is often used as an alternative explanation for any success, which is extremely difficult to attribute. Applying this broad strategy has been frequently criticised (Moran, 2012).

One of these factors is the individual's mental capacity (Gonzalez, 2006). While many mental factors affect athletes' performance, mental toughness is considered one of the most important. Some experts believe that at least 50% of an athlete's success can be attributed to mental toughness (Loehr, 1986). The capacity to react composedly and resolutely under pressure implies that mental toughness possesses an intellectual discipline. Consequently, individuals with mental toughness may cultivate and sustain positive energy within themselves during times of stress (Loehr, 1986). Mental toughness comprises three elements: confidence, consistency, and control. Confidence is thinking ahead of the competition and believing in one's ability to succeed under challenging circumstances.

When people believe they have control over many aspects of their lives, they tend to feel better about themselves, can better handle risks and obstacles, and perform cognitive tasks more effectively than others (Jones et al., 2002). Gucciardi (2008) notes that mental toughness refers to the capacity to handle and persevere through the pressures and challenges of athletic competition. This trait allows individuals to maintain greater stability, focus, and confidence than their opponents, which gives them a psychological edge. It also contributes to their coordination and helps them stay composed in stressful situations (Jones et al., 2002). Mental toughness is essential for athletes seeking to outperform their competitors in high-pressure situations. It involves a blend of self-confidence, control, focus, and determination (Jones, 1995; Gucciardi, 2008). Notably, this mental resilience has been associated with athletes across various levels,

whether competing in regional, national, international, or academic arenas.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED PAPER:

Bastug Gulsum (2018) studies the attention, focus, and mental toughness of badminton, table tennis, and tennis players. The research involved 61 athletes, with a mean age of 21.18 ± 2.96 , who participated in badminton, table tennis, and tennis. As a result, there were significant differences in the performance of the groups in terms of focus. It was found that tennis players outperformed table tennis and badminton players regarding their ability to focus (Gulsum, 2018).

Elroy Pinto's (2015) aimed to compare the mental toughness of participants in individual games against those in team games. One hundred twenty volunteers (N = 120) were involved, comprising 60 players from individual games and 60 from team games. The results showed apparent differences. Team game players did better in rebound ability, handling pressure, and overall mental toughness. They scored higher in these areas. However, there were no notable differences in motivation, confidence, and focus. Interestingly, team game players showed greater motivation, while individual players demonstrated better concentration. Both groups had similar levels of confidence. The study concluded that team game players usually have stronger mental toughness. This is likely because they receive continuous support and encouragement from their teammates, which improves their psychological resilience (Pinto, 2015).

Descriptive statistics and the paired sample t-test were used to analyse the data. Yoga has been discovered to significantly alter cricket players' pre- and post-test mental toughness and stress levels.

According to Dr Kulvinder Singh Bagga (2023), this study randomly selected 100 male subjects from various institutions of Agra University, using a pre-test, post-test method. The subjects were college-level batters who had played for at least five years. They were aged 20 to 22, with an average age of 20.8(Bagga,2023)

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

This study gathered data from male and female football players at Dhanamanjuri University and Manipur Inter-University players. Fifteen (15) male football players and fifteen (15) female football players, ages 19 to 24, were chosen (n=30). A random sampling approach was employed. The Sports Mental Toughness Questionnaire (SMTQ-14), created by Sheard, Golby, and Wersch in 2009, is used to gather data. The SMTQ-14 comprises three subscales: Confidence (6 items), Constancy (4 items), and Control (4 items). It has 14 items with a response rate on a 4-point Likert scale anchored by "not at all true" and "very true." To determine whether there was a significant difference between male and female football players, the independent t-test statistical approach was used for data analysis.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 27.0 software is used to store the collected data. To determine whether there was a significant difference between male and female football players at the 0.05 level of significance, the independent t-test statistical approach was used.

RESULT AND FINDINGS

Table 1: Mean comparison of female and male Football players:

Mental Toughness		
Group	Male (n=15)	Female (n=15)

Mean	36.40	35.47
Standard Deviation	4.37	1.96
p-value	0.46	

*Significant at $p < 0.005$

Table 1 revealed the average and standard deviation of the mental toughness ratings of both male and female football players. There is no discernible difference between male and female football players at Dhanamanjuri University in Manipur, as indicated by the p-value of mental toughness, which is 0.46 with $df = 28$ at the 0.05 significance level.

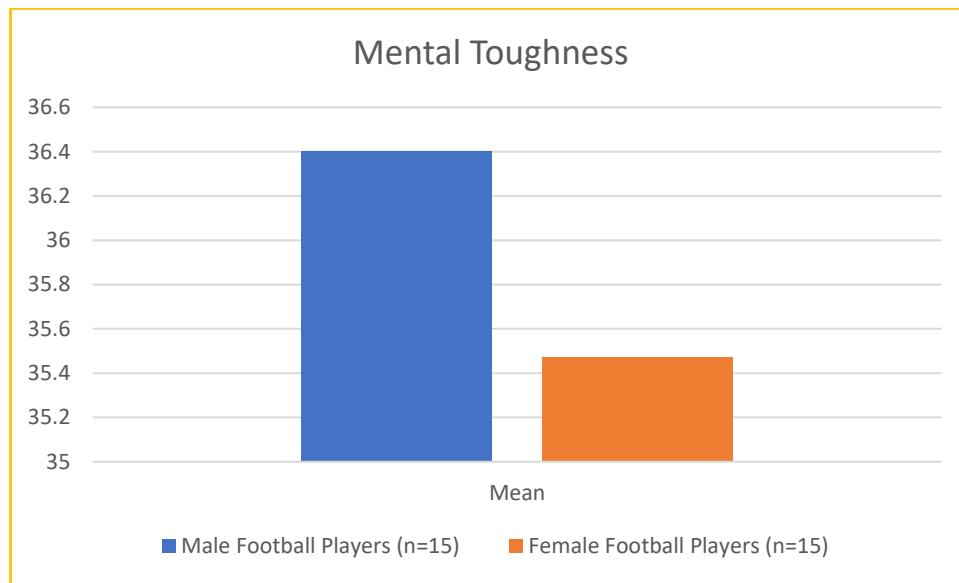


Fig. 1: Comparison of Mental Toughness between Male and Female Football Players of Dhanamanjuri University, Manipur.

DISCUSSION:

The current study investigated gender differences in mental toughness among male and female university football players at Dhanamanjuri University, Manipur, using the SMTQ-14 scale. Consistent with the results of descriptive statistics, the findings showed that there is no significant difference between the mental toughness scores of male players ($M = 36.40$, $SD = 4.37$) and female players ($M = 35.47$, $SD = 1.96$), with a p-value of .46 for the test of total scores on mental toughness. This trend suggests that, overall, the mental toughness among the genders is fairly similar for playing university football (Simsek B et al., 2023).

These results align with previous literature, which has also found no significant differences in mental toughness between genders for various groups of athletes, including those in team sports and individual sports (Şimşek et al., 2023; Yazıcı et al., 2022). Similar results were observed among the student and university athlete groups in different cultural settings, where comparable scores were noted between male and female participants on overall global mental toughness scales. On the other hand, studies have demonstrated better overall mental toughness and subscales for male participants across various sports and levels (Faruk et al., 2022; Demircan et al., 2023; Taşçı et al., 2025).

One possible reason for the absence of a gender difference within the present sample is that male and female soccer players at the University are subjected to equal training and competitive conditions. Such

considerations could support the idea that, irrespective of gender, equal resilience and coping abilities are generated. This thinking can be supported by the notion that overall experience and quality of organisational support are key determinants of improved mental toughness levels in both female and male soccer players (Wheatley et al., 2023).

The current findings can be related to the notion that mental toughness is a complex and multi-dimensional concept, influenced by individual and contextual variables, and is not biologically determined (Clough & Strycharczyk, 2017; Gucciardi et al., 2017). Previous research has suggested that the variables of age, years of participation, level of competition, and amount of training may be responsible for explaining discrepancies in mental toughness scores and, in turn, discrepancies in gender differences across sports and studies (Gumusdag, H., 2023). According to this notion, it is possible that gender can moderate, rather than directly influence, the development of mental skills and resilience in athletes.

However, several limitations must be considered when interpreting the results of this study. For example, this study had a relatively small sample size ($n = 15$ per group), which may have limited the statistical analysis's power and sensitivity to various gender effects. The second limitation is that this study examined only football players at one university, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other universities, age groups, and sports. The third limitation is that this analysis concentrated only on the Total Scores of SMTQ-14; other sub-scales are also important because there might be some other aspects based on which more results might be identified to provide more clarity in future research based on more powerful techniques, along with some more variables like Self-Efficacy and Attentional Control too (Ahsan, M et al., 2025).

Despite these shortcomings, the present study provides evidence that male and female footballers alike at Dhanamanjuri University have similar levels of mental toughness as measured by the SMTQ-14. The findings are encouraging and have significant implications. A wise approach for coaches and sport psychologists would be to avoid being overly gender-specific in their expectations of superior mental toughness. Concentrating on the quality of training, psychological skills, and supportive conditions for all players may be a more effective way to develop high levels of mental toughness than the current gender-specific approach (Simsek B et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION:

The study concludes that male and female university football players at Dhanamanjuri University report similar levels of mental toughness as measured by the SMTQ-14, with no statistically significant gender difference in total scores ($p = .46$). This finding supports the view that mental toughness in this context is shaped more by shared training conditions, competitive demands, and organisational support than by biological sex alone, and is consistent with prior research reporting negligible gender effects in athlete mental toughness.

In practical terms, the data suggests a resistive approach by coaches and sport psychologists against making gender-based assumptions about mental hardness, and instead highlights good training practices and enhances environments for players regardless of gender. The data also suggests that further research should include a number of sports and variables, such as self-efficacy and the extent to which players control their attentions.

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