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A Study of the Concept of Flow State and its Relationship with Happiness, Burnout and Resilience among Athletes

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the relationship between flow state, happiness, burnout, and resilience among male and female athletes of District Haripur. The study employed a cross-sectional correlational design to collect data from participants. Data was collected using purposive sampling from 300 male and female athletes. The study utilized the Flow Short Scale (Rheinberg et al., 2003), Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), and Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008) to measure the focal variables. Statistical correlation analysis indicated that increased levels of flow state were positively correlated with happiness and resilience, and negatively correlated with burnout. Furthermore, gender were found to significantly affect the experience of these psychological states with female athletes showed higher scores on flow state, happiness and resilience while male athletes showed higher scores on burnout. These implications underscore the significance of the facilitation of flow experiences in sports in the service of optimizing athletes' mental health and performance. The findings provide important implications for policymakers, sports psychologists, and coaches striving to design supportive environments for athletes.

Keywords: *Flow State, Happiness, Burnout, Resilience, Haripur, Athletes*

INTRODUCTION

The Flow State, characterized by balance between challenge and skill, clear objectives, and spontaneous feedback, has also been associated with a range of positive outcomes, such as greater happiness and resilience and also decreased burnout. How these variables interact can be very informative about athletes' mental health and functioning. This research incorporates gender comparative analysis, seeking to add to the literature by discussing the significance of flow experiences in enhancing positive psychological results and diminishing negative ones in sports.

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Flow State

Villines (2022) describes that an individual is in state of flow if they are completely absorbed in a task.When someone is "in flow," they might not even notice time elapsing, worry about why they are performing the task, or evaluate their efforts. Rather, they are totally focused. Flow and mindfulness are comparable in that both share present-moment concentration, but flow is most often associated with productive activity, whereas mindfulness can happen anywhere. While experiencing flow, people are most involved and mentally focused on the task they are doing. This renders the experience extremely productive (Csikszentmihalyi 2000).

Happiness

The research by Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) emphasizes the huge advantages of happiness and positive affect in improving the facets of one's life. Those who are higher on happiness are found to have better physical well-being, which includes a stronger immune system, reduced levels of stress hormones, and lower risk for cardiovascular disease largely because of having healthier lifestyle habits. Additionally, happier individuals have more fulfilling and stable interpersonal relationships, since their own positivity makes them more likable and acceptable, which strengthens social ties. Happiness also acts as a stress buffer and prevents burnout and is capable of faster recovery from adverse experiences and stronger resilience in the presence of adversity. Notably, the study finds that happiness leads to success in several areas of life, indicating that it tends to precede and enable achievement rather than being an aftereffect of it.

Resilience

Connor & Davidson (2003) emphasizes that resilience encompasses a number of essential elements such as optimism, self-efficacy, management of emotions, and social support. Optimism helps people look towards a positive future even during adversity. Self-efficacy, the perception of having ability in oneself, is important for getting through barriers. Emotional control is about managing and coping with emotional experiences in a constructive manner, and social support from teammates, family, and friends offers a supportive network of encouragement and help. Windle (2011) says that among athletes, resilience is important in order to deal with the special stressors and pressures of competitive sport. High levels of resilience can result in improved performance, enhanced mental health, and increased overall well-being.

Burnout

The importance of learning about burnout, especially in athletes, cannot be emphasized enough. Burnout is not only harmful to the mental well-being and physical ability of individual athletes but has also wider implications for team cohesion and organizational performance. Burnout can be characterized by chronic fatigue, impaired concentration ability, feelings of detachment and cynicism regarding work, impaired job performance, ineffectiveness and feelings of non-achievement, heightened irritability, and bodily symptoms like sleep problems, headaches, or gastrointestinal problems (Maslach et al. 2001). The World Health Organization (2019) has licensed and approved burnout as a new illness that happens to individuals in today's world,

especially in such a rushed and stressful work environment, leading to a sense of tiredness, loss of energy, and inability to work and live. It is important to identify these signs early enough to treat burnout well and avoid other complicating health issues.

The theoretical framework of the current research suggests that the flow state is a key psychological process that affects the psychological health in athletes. Flow is theorized to have a positive impact on happiness and resilience where deep engagement, intrinsic motivation and perceived competence increases positive affect and adaptive coping abilities. In its turn, happiness and resilience should play the role of protective factors, which have a negative predictive of burnout and decreases emotional exhaustion and disengagement as well as a sense of inefficacy. Further, gender is also included as a comparative variable to investigate the possibility of differences in the strength and direction of these relationships to provide a more refined picture of the psychological functioning in athletes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Current research indicates that flow highly promotes athlete well-being by increasing resilience and reducing burnout. Mindfulness training was found to increase flow, decrease anxiety, and enhance coping. Athletic mental energy is also linked with increased flow and decreased stress through research, while resilience and motivation buffer mood disturbance, maintaining athletes' flow states. Kim (2022) discovered that optimism decreases anxiety and depression in students via stress reduction and improved sleep, pointing to mechanisms such as stress and optimism which are equally applicable to the well-being of athletes.

Wicker et al. (2020) studied 709 elite athletes and 2,455 young residents in Germany and found athletes to score lower on well-being across all measures, while their age, income, and education differed from non-athletes. Likewise, Norsworthy et al. (2017) reviewed flow training interventions and presented that psychological methods such as hypnosis, imagery, and pre-performance routines had a huge impact on improving flow states as well as performance outcomes among elite athletes.

Liu et al. (2015) contrasted collegiate athletes across cultures and discovered differences in flow experiences across culture, gender, years of training, and type of sport, with stronger flow reported by collectivist athletes and individual-sport athletes, while Lavigne et al. (2011) examined passion and burnout and discovered that harmonious passion leads to flow and less burnout, while obsessive passion contributes to increased exhaustion, with flow being a mediator between passion and well-being.

Flow is an important psychological concept that boosts happiness and resilience and guards against burnout. Evidence from student and athlete populations demonstrates empirical support for the mediating influences of optimism, stress regulation, and passion on well-being outcomes. Cross-cultural and intervention studies also reinforce that developing flow through psychological skills and facilitative conditions can boost performance and mental health significantly and consolidate flow as a key pathway to athlete well-being across the lifespan.Current study explores the relationship between flow state, happiness, burnout and

resilience among athletes of Haripur area and compare them on demographic variables (gender etc.).

Objectives

1. To investigate the relationship of flow state with happiness, burnout and resilience.
2. To compare the level of flow state, happiness, burnout and resilience among athletes on gender.

Hypotheses

H 1: There will be a significant positive relationship between flow state experiences and happiness and resilience among male and female athletes.

H 2: There will be a significant negative relationship between flow state experiences and of burnout among male and female athletes.

H 3: There will be significant differences in the levels of flow state, happiness, burnout, and resilience between male and female athletes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In current study cross sectional survey design is employed to gather data from male and female athletes for measuring the relationship of flow state with happiness, burnout and resilience.

Sample

The sample of this study was male and female athletes of colleges of Haripur. The sample was selected on voluntary basis. Purposive sampling technique is used to collect data from required target population. Total sample size in this study was N=300 athletes. Among these were female athletes (n=150) and male athletes (n=150). Data was collected from the athletes of Colleges of District Haripur and University of Haripur. Participants were not taken outside the Haripur Hazara, School and offices.

Instruments

1. Demographic Sheet

Demographic sheet was used to collect data about gender etc.

2. Flow Short Scale (Rheinberg et al. 2003)

The 13-item Flow Short Scale developed by Rheinberg, Vollmeyer, and Engeser (2003) aims at measuring flow experiences. Ten items measure flow, scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much." The scale has shown excellent internal consistency reliability of 0.85. Three other items measure perceived importance, which are scored separately.

3. Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999)

The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) of Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) is a 4-item measure assessing global subjective happiness. The items are rated on a 7point Likert scale and have demonstrated high internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values in the range of 0.84.

3. Maslach Burnout Inventory (C. Maslach and S.E. Jackson 1981)

Christina Maslach and Susan E. Jackson's Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), developed in 1981, is a psychological measure that assesses burnout on three dimensions: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and Personal Accomplishment (PA). The MBI has demonstrated high internal consistency reliability with Cronbach alpha values usually ranging from 0.86 for Emotional Exhaustion, 0.79 for Depersonalization, and 0.71 for Personal Accomplishment. It is scored by adding the answer for each dimension, where greater scores represent increased burnout in that dimension.

5. Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008)

Smith et al., (2008) Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) is a 6-item self-report questionnaire to assess resilience, i.e., the capacity to recover from stress. The items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale, and it has been found to demonstrate reliable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients consistently approximately 0.85. The scoring is obtained by adding the responses to each of the six items, with a 6-30 range. Higher scores represent greater resilience.

Procedure

The research topic approved and authority letter collected from Department of Psychology ensuring the researcher's institutional affiliation with information stating that researcher was conducting research for the fulfillment of degree of B.S. in Psychology. Informed consents were taken from participants before administering Questionnaires and they were briefed about objectives of the research. Then participants were debriefed before the collection of data. Rapport was built with the participants and confidentiality was ensured. Data collected was entered in and analyzed using SPSS version 20.

RESULTS

Table 1

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variables	*n*	*%*

Gender			
	Male	150	50
	Female	150	50
Education Level			
	Intermediate	150	50
	Graduate/Undergraduate	150	50

Note. n= No of cases, % = percentage

Table 1 shows the distribution and percentage of samples on the basis of demographics (gender and education level). Female (n= 150, 50%), Male (n= 150, 50%) are equal in number. Participant from intermediate education level (n=150, 50%) and from graduate/undergraduate education level (n=150, 50%) both are same.

Table 2

Psychometric Properties for Scales

Scales	*K*	*M*	*S.D*	*R*	Cronbach's α
Flow Short Scale	13	60.64	14.5	17-88	.89
Subjective Happiness Scale	4	18.07	4.30	5-24	.72
Brief Resilience Scale	6	21.69	4.5	3-30	.79
Maslach Burnout Scale	21	68.8	14.9	12-119	.71

Note. *M* = Mean, *S.D* = Standard Derivation, *R* = Range, K= No of items in scale

Table 2 shows the psychometric properties of scales. The reliability analysis indicates that Cronbach's α of flow short scale is .89 which shows good internal consistency and Cronbach's α of subjective happiness scale is .72 and Cronbach's α of brief resilience scale is .79 and Cronbach's α of Maslach burnout scale is .71 which also shows good internal consistency.

Table 3(a)

Pearson Correlation between Flow State, Happiness and Resilience

Variables	1	2	3
1. Flow State	-		
2. Happiness	.67**	-	
3. Resilience	.72**	.69**	-

**$p<0.01$

Table 3(a) shows Pearson Correlation among study variables. Findings indicate that flow state has significant positive Correlation with happiness ($r= .67$, $p<0.01$) and with resilience ($r= .72$, $p<0.01$). Happiness has positive Correlation with Resilience ($r=.69$, $p<0.01$). Findings support alternative hypothesis therefore it is accepted.

Table 3(b)

Pearson Correlation between Flow State and Burnout

Variables	1	2
1. Flow State	-	
2. Burnout	-.29**	-

**$p<0.01$

Table 3(b) shows Pearson Correlation among study variables. Findings indicate that Flow state has significant negative Correlation with Burnout ($r= -.29$, $p<0.01$) Findings support alternative hypothesis therefore it is accepted.

Table 4

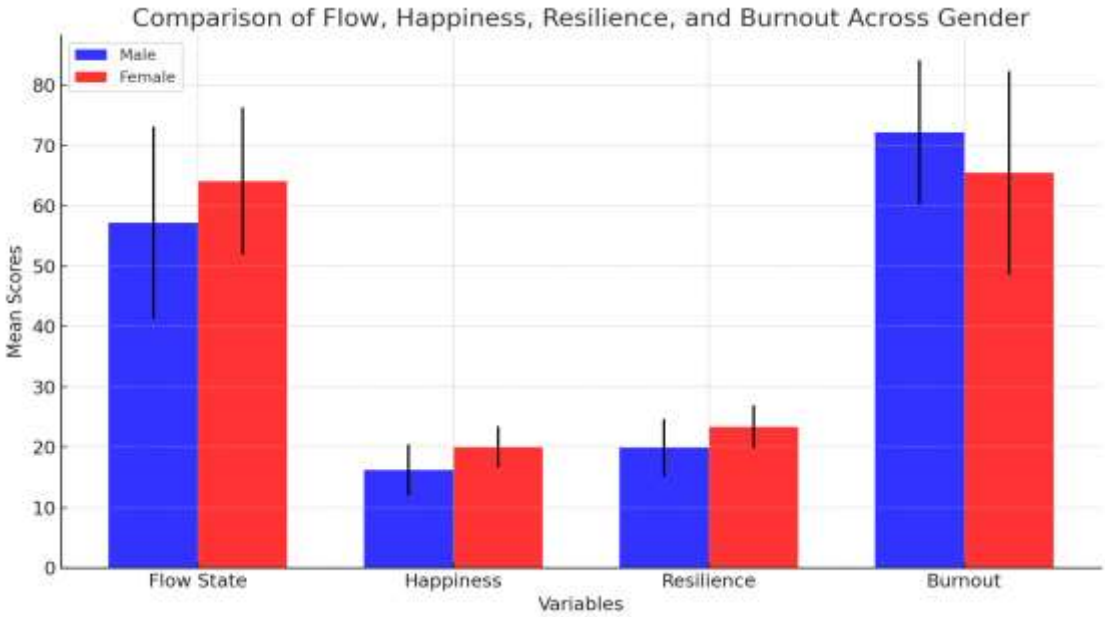
Mean Comparison of Flow State, Happiness, Resilience and Burnout across Gender

	Male		*Female*				
Variables	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*(298)	*ρ*	Cohen's *d*
Flow Short Scale	57.2	15.9	64.1	12.2	4.26	.00	.49
Subjective Happiness scale	16.2	4.21	20.04	3.41	8.86	.00	1.02
Brief Resilience scale	19.9	4.79	23.4	3.53	7.36	.00	.83
Maslach Burnout Scale	72.14	11.97	65.47	16.82	-3.95	.00	.45

Note. *M*=Mean, *SD*=Standard Deviation, *p* =level of significance

****p<.001*

Table 4(a) revealed significant mean difference on flow state across gender with *t* (298) =4.26, *p*<.001. Findings showed that females (*M*=64.1, *SD*=12.2) exhibited higher score on flow state as compare to males (*M*=57.2, *SD*=15.9). The value of Cohen's *d* was 0.49 (<.50) which indicated small effect size. Results indicated significant mean difference on happiness across gender with *t* (298) =8.86, *p*<.001. Findings showed that females (M=20.04, *SD*=3.41) significantly score higher on happiness as compare to males (*M*= 16.2, *SD*=4.21). The value of Cohen's d was 1.02 (>.80) which indicated large effect size. Results revealed significant mean difference on resilience across gender with *t* (298) =7.36, *p*<.001. Findings showed that females (*M*=23.4, *SD*=3.53) scored higher on resilience as compare to males (*M*=19.9, *SD*=4.79). The value of Cohen's d was 0.83 (>.80) which indicated large effect size. Results revealed significant mean difference on burnout across gender with *t* (298) =-3.95, *p*<.001. Findings showed that males (*M*=72.14, *SD*=11.97) scored higher on burnout as compare to females (*M*=65.47, *SD*=16.82). The



value of Cohen's d was 0.45 (<.50) which indicated small effect size. Findings supports the alternative hypothesis therefore it is accepted.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the current investigation is to assess the quantitative survey on the "Exploring the concept of flow state and its relationship with happiness, burnout, and resilience among athletes." In addition, the study sought to examine the association and demographic variation on study variables. Flow state is a psychological state where one is fully immersed in an activity, usually forgetting self and time, and results in better performance and well-being. Happiness is the subjective feeling of joy and satisfaction with life, and burnout is characterized by exhaustion, detachment, and reduced efficacy. Resilience is recovery and adaptation to stress or adversity.

The first hypothesis indicates a strong relationship between flow state, happiness, and sportsperson resilience. The empirical evidence to support this hypothesis was evident, as greater levels of flow state corresponded to higher happiness and resilience as indicated in Table 3(a). Consistent with earlier empirical work by Kim (2022), where stress was found to be significantly mediated by flow for the development of well-being, the same has been replicated here.

The second hypothesis tested the interaction between flow state and burnout in sport. From our results, a high negative correlation can be seen in Table 3(b) in which increased flow state experiences were associated with decreased burnout levels. This result confirms that of Lavigne et al. (2011), who showed that harmonious passion resulted in increased flow experiences, thereby decreasing symptoms of burnout. These results support the value of inducing flow experiences in sports environments to avoid burnout and maximize psychological well-being.

The third hypothesis suggested considerable differences between gender in flow state, happiness, burnout, and resilience among athletes in Table 4. Our findings show meaningful differences across variables where female athletes reflected higher flow and resilience levels than male athletes.Nevertheless, burnout scores, especially emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, were higher in males. These results are different from Liu et al. (2015), who indicated gender-specific differences in flow experiences among college athletes, where males tended to experience greater flow compared to females. These gender-specific differences highlight the importance of gender-specific psychological interventions to effectively support male and female athletes alike.

Limitations

i. The sample for the study was limited to Haripur district athletes, who might not portray athletes in other areas.

ii. The use of cross-sectional design puts the power of making causal inferences between flow state and the remaining variables into question.

iii. Self-report questionnaires may have introduced bias due to social desirability or inaccurate self-assessment while collecting data.

iv. The current research was carried out in Pakistan and all the participants were Muslims. Therefore, it is not certain to what degree the current results generalize to other cultural context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

i. Future studies must incorporate athletes from varying regions and levels to provide greater generalizability.

ii. Using longitudinal or experimental design can more effectively obtain causal relationships between happiness, flow, burnout, and resilience.

iii. The size of the sample should be enlarged for generalizing results.

Implications of the Study

The findings of the current study imply that coaches and sports psychologists need to actively encourage flow states among athletes through the development of training sessions where they balance skill and challenge since this will increase happiness and resilience while decreasing burnout. In addition, education and sports bodies are urged to introduce systematic programs that induce psychological well-being and resilience, hence helping athletes achieve long-term performance. Furthermore, mental health clinicians must create intervention strategies specifically addressing the needs of male and intermediate-level athletes, who seem more susceptible to

burnout and lower resilience, such that psychological interventions are targeted effectively towards those with higher risk.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research provides insight into the intricate interrelationship between flow state, happiness, burnout, and resilience in athletes. The results emphasize the positive impact of flow experiences in improving happiness and resilience and reducing symptoms of burnout, calling for well-targeted interventions that foster peak psychological states and well-being among athletes.

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