

A Comparative Study Of Depression Among Athletes And Non-Athletes

Mr. Lokesh Adhikari¹, Dr. Madhusudan Chakraborty²

¹Research Scholar, Teerthanker Mahaveer University, Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India

²Associate Professor, Teerthanker Mahaveer University, Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

Depression is a common psychological issue among adolescents. It can negatively affect their emotional balance and overall quality of life. This study was conducted to compare the depression levels of athletes and non-athletes and to see whether regular participation in sports helps improve mental health in adolescents. The sample consisted of 200 male students aged 14 to 18 years. Among them, 100 were athletes regularly involved in organized sports, while the remaining 100 were non-athletes who did not take part in any regular physical activities. The Depression subscale of the Anxiety, Depression and Stress Scale (Bhatnagar & Singh, 2011) was used to assess depression levels among the participants. An independent t-test was conducted to compare the average depression scores of the two groups. Athletes had an average score of 21.84 (SD = 9.42), while non-athletes had a higher average score of 27.18 (SD = 10.11). The t-value of 3.45 and p-value of 0.001 showed a significant difference at the 0.05 level, indicating that non-athletes experience more depression than athletes. The study suggests that regular involvement in sports helps protect adolescents from depressive symptoms and improves their emotional strength.

Keywords: Depression, Athletes, Non-Athletes, Mental Health, Adolescents, Sports Psychology

Introduction

Mental health is a vital part of overall well-being, particularly during adolescence, which is a stage marked by emotional, physical and mental growth. Depression has become a major concern among adolescents, influenced by academic pressure, social expectations, reduced physical activity and changing lifestyle patterns. Depression can appear in the form of ongoing sadness, lack of interest in activities, tiredness, social withdrawal and difficulty in thinking or concentrating. If not managed properly, it may lead to serious outcomes such as poor academic performance, behavioral problems, and long-term psychological difficulties. Participation in sports and physical activities is well recognized for its physical, social, and psychological benefits. Besides improving physical fitness, sports also help build positive mental qualities such as discipline, teamwork and better emotional control. Regular training and competition allow athletes to handle stress, manage their feelings and build self-confidence. These factors can act as protective elements that lower the chances of developing depressive symptoms. Non-athletes may not have structured routines, goal-focused activities, or regular social interaction, which can make them more prone to stress, loneliness, and emotional instability. With increasing sedentary habits among adolescents due to academic demands and the growing use of digital devices, it becomes important to understand how mental health differs between athletes and non-athletes.

This study aims to fill this gap by comparing depression levels in adolescent athletes and non-athletes, and examining whether participation in sports supports better psychological well-being.

Athletes and Non-Athletes

An athlete is a person who participates in organized sports or structured physical activities that require skill, stamina, and competitive involvement. They take part in regular training that builds discipline, encourages physical activity, strengthens social interaction, and supports continuous personal growth. These factors help improve their psychological well-being. Non-athletes are individuals who do not take part in regular, structured, or organized physical activities. Their physical movement is limited to daily routine tasks instead of planned exercise or training. They show lower levels of physical effort and are not engaged in competitive or fitness-based activities. This lower activity level may affect their overall physical and mental well-being.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to compare the levels of depression between athletes and non-athletes and to determine whether participation in sports has a positive impact on mental well-being among adolescents.

1. Objective

1. To examine and compare the level of depression among athletes and non-athletes.

2. Hypothesis

1. There would be a significant difference in depression levels between athletes and non-athletes.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional comparative design to compare depression levels between two independent groups.

3.2 Selection of Subjects

A total of 200 male students aged 14–18 years were randomly selected from six districts.

- Group A – Athletes (n = 100): Students who regularly participated in organized sports such as athletics, football, volleyball, cricket, basketball, or kabaddi.
- Group B – Non-Athletes (n = 100): Students not involved in any structured sports or regular physical activity.

3.3 Selection of Tool

The study used the Depression subscale of the Anxiety, Depression and Stress Scale (Bhatnagar & Singh, 2011), consisting of 14 items with responses scored as “Yes” = 1 and “No” = 0.

3.4 Reliability of Tool

The scale demonstrated strong reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.81 and a Spearman–Brown coefficient of 0.89, indicating high internal consistency.

3.5 Statistical Technique

Descriptive statistics (mean, SD) and an independent t-test were used to evaluate the difference in depression between the groups

4. Results and Interpretation

Group	Mean Depression Score	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-value	p-value	Significance
Athletes	21.84	9.42	3.45	0.001	Significant
Non-Athletes	27.18	10.11			

Interpretation

The results show a statistically significant difference in depression levels between athletes and non-athletes. Non-athletes have higher depression scores, which suggest that participation in sports provides support that helps protect mental health. Athletes gain benefits from physical activity, teamwork, and structured routines. These factors help reduce depressive symptoms. The results indicate a statistically significant difference in depression levels between athletes and non-athletes. Non-athletes exhibit higher depression scores, suggesting that involvement in sports serves as a protective factor. Athletes benefit from physical exertion, teamwork, and structured routines, which collectively help reduce depressive symptoms.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study match earlier research (Parmar et al., 2023; Wilson, 2016), which shows that regular participation in sports is linked to lower levels of depression. Athletes receive psychological benefits such as reduced stress, better emotional control, higher self-confidence, and improved social interaction. These experiences strengthen their coping skills and help protect them from depressive symptoms. Physically, regular activity supports the release of endorphins, which improve mood and reduce stress. Sports also raise self-esteem by providing chances to achieve goals, improve skills, and receive social recognition. Non-athletes may lack structured physical routines and have fewer opportunities for social interaction, which can lead to negative emotions, loneliness, and stress. Increased sedentary behavior and growing digital dependence among adolescents can further raise their risk of depression. The study highlights the importance of including regular sports, fitness activities, and team-based programs in schools and colleges to support better mental health among students.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that there is a significant difference in depression levels between athletes and non-athletes. Athletes exhibit lower depression scores due to the positive psychological and physiological effects of sports participation. Non-athletes show higher levels of depression, highlighting the need to encourage more adolescents to engage in regular physical activities. Promoting sports and fitness programs among school and college students can play a vital role in supporting mental and emotional well-being. Policymakers must recognize the importance of physical activity as a preventive and supportive approach to reducing depression among youth.

7. References

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