

Grit, Resilience & Agency in Sportspersons and Non-Sportspersons

Ms. Urvashi Shrivastava¹, Dr. Vinay Mishra²

¹Asst. Prof., Psychology, Jagran Lakecity University, Bhopal.

²Professor, Psychology, Bhopal School of Social Sciences, Bhopal.

ABSTRACT: Physical fitness results from regular physical activity, whichever form it may be in. The benefits of physical fitness towards the development of mental health and vice versa have been well-researched. The current study aims to study the difference in the levels of agency, resilience and grit in sportsperson and non-sportsperson and also seeks to establish the relationship between agency, resilience and grit. Agency refers to the belief of an individual in his ability to bring change in his life. Resilience refers to rebounding after facing the obstacles that hinder the path to achievement of goal. Grit has been referred to as the perseverance of goals over long-term in spite of failure and adversity. It was hypothesized that sportsperson will show higher levels of grit, resilience and agency as compared to the non-sportsperson. It was found that non-sportsperson exhibited higher levels of grit, resilience and agency as compared to sportsperson; however the difference was not found significant except in the case of agency.

Keywords: Grit, resilience, agency, sportsperson, non-sportsperson.

I. INTRODUCTION

Athletes, coaches and sports enthusiasts have speculated on the characteristics which separate a good athlete from a great one. It has been seen that there is a very less difference in the physical prowess of top athletes. Yet, there are some factors that differentiate the good from the great.

Recruiters, coaches and scouts name grit as the quality that they look for in an athlete. Many coaches of fame believe that talent can be taught but grit is essential to lay a proper foundation. Duckworth et al. (2007) defined grit as self-discipline, combined with a passionate commitment to a task and a burning desire to see it through. Duckworth's research further revealed that grit was a significant predictor of success, contrary to belief that IQ, academic achievement, physical health or good looks would be a better predictor of success.

Psychological resilience is defined as an individual's ability to properly adapt to stress and adversity. This stress and adversity can come in the shape of health problems, workplace and financial worries, or family or relationship problems, among others (A.P.A., 2014). The quality in humans which aids them to come back stronger from the adversities in life has been termed as resilience. Hopf (2010) opines resilience as a "positive adaptation" after a stressful or adverse situation. Instead of getting bogged down by failure, they find a way to rise from it and strive once again towards success. A positive attitude, the ability to see failure as a form of helpful feedback, optimism, the ability to regulate emotions are factors that have been identified as helping people become resilient.

Rutter (2008) opines that resilience should be considered a process, rather than a trait to be had. It is not a rare trait, it can be found in the average individual and it can be learned and developed by virtually anyone. A common misconception related to resilient people is that they do not experience negative emotions or thoughts and remain optimistic in most situations. However, it is observed that resilient individuals develop coping techniques through experience that allows them to navigate crises effectively and relatively easily (Block & Block, 1980; Klohn, 1996; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). In other words, resilient people have an optimistic attitude and positive emotionality and are able to balance negative emotions with positive ones effectively (A.P.A., 2014).

Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997) defined self-efficacy as the belief one has in his capability to carry out a definite task successfully to achieve a certain outcome. Bandura (1986) further iterated that self-efficacy beliefs are not judgments about what skills one possesses; rather they are judgments about what can be achieved with the skills that one possesses. These judgments are a product of self-persuasion and self-appraisal which depends on processing of information (Bandura, 1990) derived from vicarious experiences, past performance accomplishments, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Maddux (1995) and Schunk (1995) have added separate categories for imaginable experiences and emotional states. Self-efficacy is considered to be one of the most influential traits which affect achievement strivings in sports (Feltz, 1988). Self- as well as team-efficacy has been reported as the chief factor influencing performance at the Nagano Olympic Games (Gould et al., 1999).

Experience indicates that sport and play activities access and activate an innate resilience that helps to protect, strengthen, and heal people in times of extreme stress (Henley, 2005). Sport programs use different approaches to divert young people from crime and anti-social behaviour (Burrows, 2003) including: offering attractive and positive activities for young people; building resilience in young people so that they can better resist pressure to take part in harmful or anti-social behaviour; increasing young people's self-esteem and organizational and social skills; providing positive role models through the coaches and local organizers leading the activities; and decreasing the perception and fear of crime and anti-social behaviour in the community.

Grit, resilience and agency are some of the variables falling under the aegis of positive psychology which are revolutionizing psychological research. Though, resilience and agency have been under study for quite some time, grit is a relatively new construct getting attention of researchers. The present study aims at studying these variables of positive psychology in context of sportsperson and non-sportsperson and the possible impact of sports on the psyche of the society.

II. HYPOTHESES

1. Sportspersons will show higher level of grit as compared to non-sportspersons.
2. Sportspersons will show higher level of resilience as compared to non-sportspersons.
3. Sportspersons will show higher level of agency as compared to non-sportspersons.
4. There will be a positive correlation between the grit, resilience and self-efficacy.

III. SAMPLE

The total sample for the present study consisted of 80 subjects belonging to Bhopal city. The sample was divided into two equal groups on the basis of their participation in sports. Hence, two groups of 40 subjects each were made: group one consisting of 40 sportsperson and group two consisting of 40 non-sportsperson.

IV. TOOLS

1. **Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale:** Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale was developed by Connor and Davidson (2003) and it strives to measure the ability of an individual to cope with stress and adversity. Respondents rate 25 items on a scale of 'not true at all' to 'true nearly all the time'. The range of scores is 0-100 with a high score indicating high levels of resilience. The scale demonstrates adequate internal consistency ($\alpha > .80$).
2. **Self-efficacy scale:** The Self-Efficacy Scale was developed by Schwarzer & Jerusalem (1979) with an idea to assess a general sense of perceived self-efficacy with the aim of predicting coping with daily hassles as well as adaptation after experiencing all kinds of stressful life events. Subjects respond to 10 items on a 4-point scale 'not true at all' to 'exactly true'. The range of scores is 10-40 with high score indicating higher levels of self-efficacy. Cronbach's alphas ranged from .76 to .90 indicating adequate internal consistency. Criterion-related validity is documented in numerous correlation studies where positive coefficients were found with favourable emotions, dispositional optimism, and work satisfaction.
3. **Grit scale:** The Grit Scale was developed by Duckworth et al. (2007) to measure grit and its two components: perseverance of effort and consistency of interest. The response alternatives range on a 5-point scale for 17 items from 'not like me at all' to 'very much like me'. The scores range from 17 to 85 with high scores indicating high levels of grit. This scale has received high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) ranging between .77 and .85 across 6 studies (Duckworth et al., 2007).

V. PROCEDURE

Subjects who were identified to be sportsperson and non-sportsperson were approached and their cooperation was solicited. The scales were administered in small groups of 4-5 subjects at a time. While selecting the sportspersons, the type of sport they played was not taken into account, i.e. whether they specialized in indoor or outdoor sports. The subjects were debriefed about the purpose of the research after ensuring that they had marked a response for each item when they returned the scales.

VI. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The hypotheses set initially were tested with the help of 't' test and Pearson's product moment correlation as was applicable. The first hypothesis under study stated that sportspersons will show higher levels of grit as compared to non-sportspersons. The analysis illustrates the mean grit score for the sportspersons ($M=47.6$, $SD=5.22$) to be lesser than that of non-sportspersons ($M=51.3$, $SD=9.54$). This difference was not found to be statistically significant at 0.05 level of significance ($t=1.47$). Hence, the first hypothesis is rejected.

The second hypothesis stated that sportspersons will show higher levels of resilience as compared to non-sportspersons. Through analysis it was observed that mean resilience score of sportsperson ($M=58.9$,

SD=9.39) was lesser than that of non-sportsperson (M=62.95, SD=5.91). The difference was not found to be significant at 0.05 level of significance ($t=1.59$). Hence, the second hypothesis is rejected.

Third hypothesis under study stated that sportspersons will show higher level of agency as compared to non-sportspersons. The analysis revealed the mean agency scores of sportspersons (M=25.6; SD=2.81) to be lower than that of non-sportspersons (M=31.6; SD=4.57) and the difference was found to be significant at 0.01 level of significance ($t=3.72$). Thus, the hypothesis is accepted.

The results observed are quite unexpected. Contrary to expectations, non-sportsperson score higher on all the three variables as compared to the sportsperson. The hypothesis were so set with the expectation that the physical fitness that the sportspersons revel in is not present for the non-sportsperson and the direct reinforcement experienced from the rewards that they achieve would lead them to have significantly greater levels of resilience and agency at least, if not of grit also. However, this was not so. Non-sportsperson exhibit higher levels of all three variables, though the difference in the levels of grit and resilience is not significant, the difference in levels of agency is statistically significant at 0.01 level of significance.

Success at sports is always a comparative performance, in spite of all the practice one puts in; his performance will always be subject to comparison to performance of others. The performance of an individual in a field not related to sports is dependent on his own performance: if he works hard, he will achieve success, if he does not work hard, he may in all likelihood fail. However, the amount of practice and hard-work that a sportsperson puts in may not be the only factor in his success, how well or how poor the other participants perform also has a direct impact on the success of the sportsperson. As agency is all about the verdict one passes on his own ability to complete a task successfully and as sportsperson cannot depend on just their own belief about whether they will achieve success or not, this may have led to the significantly lower level of agency observed in the sportsperson. Additionally, sportsperson are habitual of following the instructions of their coaches as regards their training and decisions related to their competitive life, taking the onus of the decision out of their hand. Whereas, non-sportsperson not only have to take responsibility of their decision but the responsibility of the effect it has on those around them also, thus resulting in higher grit and resilience for non-sportsperson.

Sportsperson also tend to think in absolute terms, i.e. hard work and practice are the only two ways of attaining success whereas a non-sportsperson needs to be more creative in the solutions that he needs to generate for a particular problem, as there are no absolute solutions to any problem. Furthermore, the sports scenario in India is mostly biased in favour of cricket. The rest of the sportsperson do not get the same amount of recognition nor facilities that the cricketers do.

Another reason (and a limitation of the study) may be the fact that all the sportsperson who participated in the study belonged to the same college and the environmental influence of the college and the college authorities may come into play. Many a times, family responsibilities also impose restrictions on an individual, which may be a more important factor for the sportspersons as they need to spend a lot of time out of the house practicing and so are less able to give time to their family as well as having to leave their family behind when they participate in various competitions.

The fourth hypothesis stated that there will be a positive correlation between the grit, resilience and self-efficacy. To test the hypothesis, correlation was calculated between two variables at a time using Pearson's product moment method. A positive correlation was found between all three pairs, low correlation was observed between grit and agency ($r=+0.37$) and resilience and agency ($r=+0.27$) and a moderate correlation was observed between grit and resilience ($r=+0.53$).

Grit refers to the passion an individual possess which makes him strive for his long-term goals. Agency refers to the belief in one's capability to carry out a task efficaciously, the decision of an individual as to whether or not he has the capability to perform a task and not associated with the need for achieving the goal. Although, there is a positive correlation between grit and agency and resilience and agency indicating that the variables are positively related to each other, the correlation observed is almost negligible in nature.

A moderate relationship has been observed between grit and resilience. Both the variables aim at achieving goals – one refers to persevering till the goal is achieved and the other talks about keeping at it till the goal is achieved in spite of the obstacles met in the path to goal achievement. As the two variables have a similar nature, the observed relationship was an expected outcome.

Physical activity is linked to reduced risk of over 20 diseases including cardiovascular diseases, depression, anxiety, emotional disturbances, improved mood, reducing symptoms of stress, anger and depression (Taylor, Sallis & Needle, 1985), alleviating anxiety (Taylor, Sallis & Needle, 1985) and slowing cognitive decline.etc. Majority research has been conducted keeping adults in focus but evidence among adolescents is also present significantly linking increased leisure-time physical activity with fewer depressive symptoms over a two-year period (Motl et al., 2004). Another study conducted on women aged 70–81 showed that those with the highest physical activity quintile have a 20 per cent lower risk of cognitive decline (including tests of general cognition, verbal memory and attention) (Weuve et al., 2004).

Playing sports develops characteristics of respect, integrity, compassion, honor, and teamwork in the players. These characteristics are desirable in the youth of the country so that they learn to practice integrity in all aspects of life, do the correct thing even when no one is looking. In a society that is fast shifting towards materialism and individualism, becoming involved in a sport and developing sportsmanship will inculcate and develop compassion and honor in the youth, possibly changing the course of the society.

VII. CONCLUSION

The results of this study present surprising results where it was observed that non-sportsperson exhibited higher levels of grit, resilience and agency as compared to the sportsperson, contrary to expectations. It seems that the poor equipments, resources and conditions available to sportsperson may be the reason behind this startling finding. There are many accounts available of various sportsperson who have won laurels for the country in all major international sports competitions and yet who are reduced to selling vegetables on the street for livelihood. Politicization of the sports procedures and authorities also needs to be checked.

The study, however, comes with a few limitations such a small sample which has been collected from a single institution. A more widespread sample may yield a more reliable result. Also, the sample consists of undergraduate and post-graduate students who were studying for a degree (not in physical education), that is they were not full-time sportsperson, though they were national level sportsperson. A study involving full-time sportsperson would yield different results. Also, level and type of motivation could also have been studied.

REFERENCES

- [1]. American Psychological Association. (2014). *The Road to Resilience*.
- [2]. Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191-215.
- [3]. Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundation of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- [4]. Bandura, A. (1990). Perceived self-efficacy in the exercise of personal agency. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 2, 128-163.
- [5]. Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman.
- [6]. Block, J. H., & Block, J. (1980). "The role of ego-control and ego-resiliency in the origination of behavior", pp. 39-101 in W. A. Collins (Ed.) *The Minnesota Symposia on Child Psychology*, Vol. 13. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- [7]. Burrows, M. (2003). *Evaluation of the Youth Inclusion Programme: End of Phase One Report* (London: Youth Justice Board, online: Youth Justice Board, cited in M. Totten, *The Cost of Excluding Ontario's Youth from Play. A Call to Action!*, (Play Works Partnership, Toronto ON: 2005), online: Play Works).
- [8]. Connor K.M., Davidson J.R.T. (2003). Development of a New Resilience Scale: The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CDRISC). *Depression and Anxiety*, 18: 76-82.
- [9]. Duckworth, A.L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M.D. & Kelly, D.R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 9, 1087-1101.
- [10]. Feltz, D. L. (1988). Self-confidence and sports performance. In K. B. Pandolf (Ed.) *Exercise and Sport Sciences Reviews*, (pp. 423-457). New York: MacMillan.
- [11]. Gould, D., Greenleaf, C., Lauer, L., & Chung, Y. (1999). *Lessons from Nagano. Olympic Coach*, 9 (3), 2-5.
- [12]. Henley, R. (2005). *Helping Children Overcome Disaster Trauma Through Post-Emergency Psychosocial Sports Programs*. (Biel: Swiss Academy for Development, 2005) at 5, online: International Platform on Sport and Development <<http://www.sportanddev.org/data/document/document/209.pdf>>. [Henley, Helping].
- [13]. Hopf S.M (2010). "Risk and Resilience in Children Coping with Parental Divorce". *Dartmouth Undergraduate Journal of Science*.
- [14]. Klohnen, E. C. (1996). "Conceptual analysis and measurement of the construct of ego-resiliency". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70 (5): 1067-79. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.70.5.1067. PMID 8656335.
- [15]. Maddux, J.E. (1995). Self-efficacy theory: An introduction. In J.E. Maddux (Ed.), *Self-efficacy, adaptation, and adjustment: Theory, research, and application* (pp. 3-33). New York: Plenum.
- [16]. Motl, R.; Birbaum, A.; Kubik, M. et al. (2004). 'Naturally occurring changes in physical activity are inversely related to depressive symptoms during early adolescence', *Psychosom Med*, 66(3): 336-42: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15184692>
- [17]. Rutter, M. (2008). "Developing concepts in developmental psychopathology", pp. 3-22 in J.J. Hudziak (ed.), *Developmental psychopathology and wellness: Genetic and environmental influences*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing
- [18]. Schunk, D.H. (1995). Self-efficacy and education and instruction. In J.E. Maddux (Ed.), *Self-efficacy, adaptation, and adjustment: Theory, research, and application*, (pp. 281-303). New York: Plenum.
- [19]. Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1995). Generalized Self-Efficacy scale. In J. Weinman, S. Wright, & M. Johnston, *Measures in health psychology: A user's portfolio. Causal and control beliefs* (pp. 35-37). Windsor, UK: NFER-NELSON.
- [20]. Taylor, B., J.F. Sallis and R. Needle. 'The relationship of physical activity and exercise to mental health', *Pub Health Rpts* 1985 100(2): 195-201: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1424736/M>. Babyak, J. Blumenthal and S. Herman, 'Exercise treatment for major depression: maintenance of therapeutic benefit at 10 months', *Psychosom Med* 2000, 62(5): 633-8: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11020092>
- [21]. Werner, E., & Smith, R. S. (1992). *Overcoming the odds: high risk children from birth to adulthood*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- [22]. Weuve, J., J. Kang and J. Manson et al. (2004). 'Physical activity, including walking, and cognitive function in older women', *JAMA*, 292(12): 1454-61: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15383516>
- [23]. Wolin, S. J., & Wolin, S. (1993). *Bound and Determined: Growing up resilient in a troubled family*. New York: Villard