

Hardiness and coping strategies in retired national selected athletes during the Covid -19 pandemic

Personalidad resistente y estrategias de afrontamiento en atletas seleccionados nacionales retirados durante pandemia Covid -19

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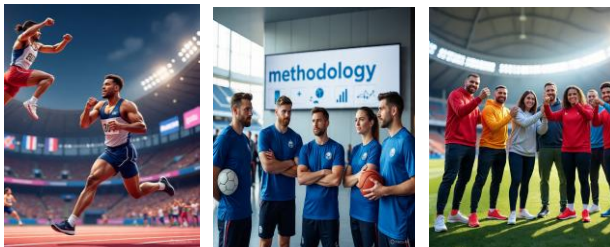


Abstract

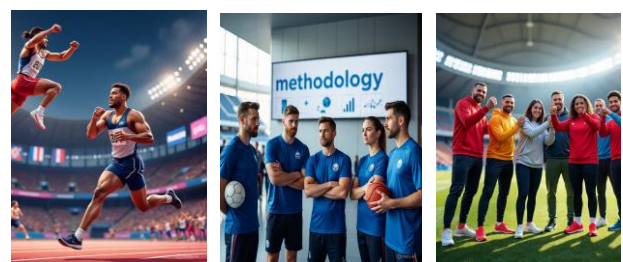
The Covid-19 pandemic revealed emotional instabilities due to stress in the entire sports population. The objective of this work is to identify the existence of a relationship between the variables of the resistant personality and those of coping approach in sport, in conditions of confinement, in the COVID-19 pandemic. The sample is made up of 42 nationally selected athletes, with experience in world championships in their sport, 23 men participated, equivalent to 54.8% and 19 women corresponding to 45.2%, the age of the athletes ranged between 16 and 54 years, with a mean of 22.67 and a standard deviation of 7.64. This research was developed with a non-experimental quantitative approach with a cross-sectional, descriptive and correlational design, descriptive and reliability analyses, in addition to Spearman correlations with SPSS 25 software. The instruments used were Hardiness in Central American and Caribbean Athletes [HPCACA; Ponce et al. 2015] instruments were used, composed of 18 items. The second is the Approach to Coping in Sport Questionnaire [ACSQ 1] in Spanish version [Kim et al., 2003]. The results are an adequate reliability in the measurement instruments and a correlation value of $r = .584$ [$p < .05$]. The conclusion is the confirmation of the existence of a positive and significant correlation between the resilient personality control variable and mental withdrawal approach coping in sport.

Resumen

La pandemia de Covid-19 puso de manifiesto, inestabilidades emocionales por estrés en toda la población deportiva. El objetivo de este trabajo es identificar la existencia de relación entre las variables de la personalidad resistente y las de aproximación del afrontamiento en el deporte, en condiciones de confinamiento, en pandemia COVID-19. La muestra está conformada por 42 atletas seleccionados nacionales, con experiencia en mundiales de su deporte, participaron 23 hombres que equivalen al 54.8% y 19 mujeres correspondientes al 45.2%, la edad de los atletas osciló entre los 16 y 54 años, con una media de 22.67 y una desviación típica de 7.64. Esta investigación se desarrolló con un enfoque cuantitativo de tipo no experimental con un diseño transversal, descriptivo y correlacional, los análisis descriptivos y de fiabilidad, además de las correlaciones de Spearman con el software SPSS 25. Los instrumentos utilizados fueron el Cuestionario de Personalidad Resistente en Deportistas Centroamericanos y del Caribe y Cuestionario de Aproximación al Afrontamiento en el Deporte. Los resultados son una fiabilidad adecuada en los instrumentos de medición y un valor de correlación de $r = .584$ [$p < .05$]. La conclusión es la confirmación de la existencia de una correlación positiva y significativa entre la variable de control de la personalidad resistente y retraimiento mental de aproximación del afrontamiento en el deporte.



Stress, Sport and Control



Estrés, Deporte, Control

Area: Promotion of frontier research and basic science in all fields of knowledge

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Introduction

Psychology, at the present time has gained an essential importance given the circumstances in the pandemic by Covid-19. Respiratory syndrome [SARS-CoV-2], was identified as COVID-19 in December 2019, this global event affected humanity economically, educationally [Falasifah, Fitria, & Hakim, 2021] and socially Xing et al., 2020; De La Serna, [2022], therefore, it has wreaked havoc on the emotional and psychological health of people [Seale et al., 2020], subsequent to the forced confinement for prevention of increased contagion [Urzúa et al., 2020]. Psychological and emotional health was compromised with the appearance of stress, anxiety [Valiente et al., 2020], fear [Broche-Pérez et al., 2020] due to the presence and consequences of the pandemic and confinement.

Without pandemic, the athlete when presented in competitions and in the training itself faces situations that lead him to feel stress, this is where the psychology of sport in recent decades has had enormous relevance, it is already part of the multidisciplinary team that helps in the development and control of emotions of high-level athletes [Ponce, 2017; Piñeros, 2021]. The sports psychologist develops skills in elite athletes, since it has been identified that when there is no emotional balance, there are physical complaints, mental debilitation or drowsiness, so psychological care allows the athlete to learn to recognize their moods, stressful moments and establish a balance between the mental load and training and thus establish an optimal environment for personal development and of course sport, which is why the sport psychologist is increasingly necessary for the achievement of results, and the improvement of performance, health and education of the people involved in this sport. [García-Naveira, 2018].

Sports competition represents a confrontation with stress, this emotional state, causes phenomena of lack of concentration, control, confidence, appearance of nervousness and negative thoughts, some researchers have done work where they provide tools such as self-dialogue, obtaining as a result that anxiety and stress decrease considerably and therefore athletes can get ahead with their competitive commitments [Barahona-Fuentes, Soto, & Huerta, 2019].

There is no doubt that psychology has made more important contributions for the proper management of emotions, and that is why it is indicated that it is a concept, which is based on existential psychology, with a positivist approach, since the experiences although difficult, are part of learning, This concept was born with Maddi and Kobasa [Maddi, 2002], who together with students were interested in resolving the question of why there are people who, being subjected to constant stress, get sick, but in the same situation others do not? , On the contrary, those who did not get sick, experienced processes of personal development, after going through challenges and problems, they perceived themselves as more capable of solving and improving, feeling that in some way, there was a gain in these experiences. Resilient personality is defined as an integral concept that measures resistance to stress, if there is a higher resilient personality, the subject perceives as opportunities for growth their problems, or their challenges and assumes them with pleasure because they see it as a benefit, and on the contrary someone who has a low resilient personality, can even get sick of stress, does not resist being exposed to constant challenges [Ponce, 2017; Ponce-Carbajal, Tristán, Jaenes, Rodenas, & Peñaloza, 2020; Ponce-Carbajal, López-Walle, Jaenes, Peñaloza, & Méndez, 2020].

The resilient personality is integrated by variables that are control, commitment and challenge, the scale has evidence of adequate reliability not only in a trifactorial way but also in a unifactorial way and also presents a quality that is, that it has the ability to measure in both ways according to its adequate values in internal consistency analysis and confirmatory factor analysis [Jaenes, 2008; Jaenes, Godoy, & Román, 2009; Ponce, 2017; Ponce-Carbajal, Tristán, Jaenes, Rodenas, & Peñaloza, 2020; Ponce-Carbajal, López-Walle, Jaenes, Peñaloza, & Méndez, 2020; Ponce-Carbajal, López-Walle, & Méndez, 2021a; Ponce-Carbajal, López-Walle, & Méndez, 2021b].

The very nature of training every day and maintaining a high level of fatigue and sustaining it for years represents a stress for athletes, in some athletes, stress does not allow them to act normally and manifest, loss of control of their emotions and are prone to make mistakes and on the other hand we have those who like to be the center of attention and enjoy the competition [Jaenes and Caracuel, 2006].

The resilient personality has been studied in various sports, since sport is an environment where there is the presence of stress due to the nature of training, for example there are investigations in marathon [Jaenes, et al., 2008; 2009], long-distance and ultra-distance running [De la Vega, Rivera and Ruiz, 2010], rugby [Sheard and Golby, 2010], soccer [Franco, 2009; López-López, 2011], swimming [Franco, 2009; Prieto, Ortega, Garcés de los Fayos, & Olmedilla, 2014], athletics [Franco, 2009], rhythmic gymnastics [Jaenes, Carmona, Lopa, 2010], volleyball, handball and basketball [Franco, 2009; Sheard and Golby, 2010], wrestling [Sheard and Golby, 2010] and crossfit [Vezzani, 2015]. Also in research in various sports such as studies in Central American and Caribbean athletes [Ponce, 2017], as well as in World Cup and Olympic athletes [Ponce-Carbajal, López-Walle, Méndez, 2021].

Athletes, unlike people who are not, tend to develop a greater life experience, since they have a sporting social context and a non-sporting one, where the environments in which they develop are practically double, since they interact in one day, with their school teacher, and with their sports coach, with his group mates at school and with his training partners and so on, when a person who is not in sport only interacts with half of these environments, therefore, there is the assumption of accelerated social learning in the case of athletes, as established in their research by Henriksen [2009] and Ponce [2021].

Therefore, mental health is a more compromised state in the athlete as he/she experiences a greater number of situations and that is why in this research we will involve Coping or Coping with various situations.

The definition of coping, as those cognitive and behavioral efforts that are made internally and externally that the individual perceives as a threat or considers that overcome it, then, coping strategies are those developed by athletes to confront situations or complications, with the conviction to control their emotions, there are two types of coping, the first, The second type is focused on the problem and seeks to generate solutions, taking into consideration the cost-benefit and choosing an alternative and this gives the opportunity to make improvements for subsequent events or competitions with those strategies that have given better results [Lazarus and Folkman, 1984].

Roth and Cohen [1986] presented two different coping styles. The first is the approach style, which refers to the athlete's interest in solving the problem by facing the facts. The second is the avoidance style, in which the athlete avoids the situation that causes him/her discomfort. These researchers propose the analysis of the four relationships and establish a recognition of the way in which the athlete usually acts [Krohne, 1996].

Coping in athletes is something they will always struggle with, therefore, strategies are important to act appropriately. For this reason, athletes must develop various strategies as a tool to cope with stressful situations that are typical of the competitive climate in order to achieve goals and improve athletic performance [Weinberg, & Gould, 2010].

Coping in sports is about athletes choosing an appropriate strategy during competitions that helps them manage their negative emotions, receive information in an organized manner, plan their responses according to the resources available to them, and executing the most appropriate actions, giving them the opportunity to control their anxiety by choosing the right actions to resolve the conflictive situation [Cantón-Chirivella, Checa-Esquiva, & Vellisca-González, 2015].

The approach to coping in sport is made up of various variables such as Calm Emotion, Active Planning/Cognitive Restructuring, Mental Withdrawal, Risk Behaviors, and Seeking Social Support. This questionnaire has been used in various studies, finding adequate values in its internal consistency [Kim, Duda, Tomás, and Balaguer, 2003; Balaguer, Duda, Kim, 2003; Ponce-Carbajal, López-Walle, and Méndez, 2021b]. Approach strategies for coping in sport have been used in various studies in multiple sports such as soccer [Catalá and Peñacoba, 2019; Piñeros, 2021], water polo [Sepúlveda-Páez, Díaz-Karmelic, and Ferrer-Urbina, 2019], golf [Pinto and Vázquez, 2013], athletics, boxing, cycling, diving, gymnastics, weightlifting, karate, modern pentathlon, taekwondo, and volleyball [Ponce-Carbajal, López-Walle, and Méndez, 2021b], judo [Castillo, 2016; Ponce-Carbajal, López-Walle, and Méndez, 2021b], in another study, other sports were examined, such as rhythmic gymnastics, athletics, soccer, tennis, taekwondo, basketball, and volleyball [Iancheva, 2021].

Few studies have been conducted during the pandemic and lockdown, and the lack of studies of this nature is surprising given that there is a whole world of sport to explore and multiple options for emotional responses. We therefore believe that we are promoting the idea of enriching this field of study with the aim of finding better tools for active athletes to be more emotionally stable and improve their competitive performance, drawing on the experience of those who have already finished their sporting careers.

Therefore, this research aims to identify the existence of a relationship between the variables of resilient personality and those of approach coping in sport, under conditions of confinement during the COVID-19 pandemic, in a sample of retired athletes who were national team members and had worldwide experience in competitions in their sport, making them a very special group of athletes.

Methodology

The design of this research is empirical, non-experimental quantitative approach with a cross-sectional, descriptive and correlational design [Hernández, Fernández-Collado, & Baptista, 2006].

Participants

The population for this research consisted of 42 athletes, all nationally selected, with experience in world championships in their sport, the sample consisted of 23 men equivalent to 54.8% and 19 women corresponding to 45.2%, the age of the athletes ranged between 16 and 54 years, with a mean of 22.67 and a standard deviation of 7.64. As inclusion criteria, it was established that those athletes who had ever been part of the Mexican national team in any sport should participate, another selection criterion were those athletes who had participated in at least one world championship in their sport specialty and the last one was that they were exclusively those who are already retired.

In the exclusion criteria, those athletes who did not finish the instruments properly, another criterion was those who were currently still contemplated for any competition and finally those who decided to withdraw their participation for some personal reason.

Instruments

The first assessment instrument is called the Resilient Personality Questionnaire in Central American and Caribbean Athletes [PRDCC; Ponce-Carbajal et al. 2015] which measures resilient personality, this questionnaire is made up of 18 items, and is integrated by three factors: commitment [6 items], control [6 items] and challenge [6 items]. This instrument has been used in a trifactorial way by some investigations [Kobasa, 1979a; 1982; Kobasa, [1979b]; Kobasa, Maddi and Kahn, 1982; Jaenes, Godoy-Izquierdo and Román, 2008; Meda-Lara, Yeo-Ayala, Juárez-Rodríguez, Palomera-Chávez, and Moreno-Jiménez, 2021], commonly the properties are adequate obtaining acceptable reliability values for all subscales [Commitment $\alpha = 0.81$, Control $\alpha = 0.79$, Challenge $\alpha = 0.75$]. The response scale is Likert-type from 0 to 3 where 0 is “strongly disagree” and 3 “strongly agree”.

The components of the resilient personality are defined as follows: sport commitment is the desire to persist in an effort for a certain period, according to Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, and Keeler [1993]; Peñaloza, Jaenes, Andrade, Méndez [2013]; control is a quality to think and execute with the conviction that one personally influences the course of events and consequently manage the stimuli to one's own benefit [López-López, 2011].

For Kobasa [1979a], control, contemplates by three variables: 1] cognitive control, or ability to interpret, appreciate, give meaning to and incorporate various types of stressful events into a life plan and act accordingly, as well as having the ability to defuse their negative effects; 2] decisional control, or ability to choose for oneself, among a variety of possibilities to act to manage stress, and; 3] coping control, or ability to execute, a wide range of appropriate responses to stress, which is developed, through motivation for success in all scenarios. Challenge refers to the perception of potentially stressful, difficult and changing stimuli, this quality makes people experience cognitive flexibility, establishing an opportunity to learn, grow and develop personally [Kobasa, 1979a].

The second is the Approach to Coping in Sport Questionnaire [ACSQ-1] in its Spanish version [Kim et al., 2003; Balaguer et al., 2003]. The questionnaire has 28 items and 5 variables: Emotional Calmness [7 items], Cognitive Restructuring [6 items], Search for Social Support [5 items], Mental Withdrawal [6 items] and Risky Behaviors [4 items]. This questionnaire has been used in several investigations showing appropriate internal consistency values of more than .70 [Kim, Duda, Tomás, & Balaguer, 2003; Ponce-Carbajal, López-Walle, & Méndez, 2021b]. The response scale is a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 “never” to 5 “always”.

The psychometric properties of Approaching Coping in Sport, usually present adequate values, however, in the last factor of risk behaviors is below the $\alpha = .70$ of Cronbach's alpha, but this could be explained since it only has four items, specifically in the research of Kim et al., 2003, where the values of Emotional Calm [$\alpha = .71$], Active Planning/Cognitive Restructuring [$\alpha = .74$], Seeking Social Support [$\alpha = .78$], Mental Withdrawal [$\alpha = .78$] and Risky Behaviors [$\alpha = .64$] are adequate and the latter moderately acceptable according to researchers [Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998].

The variables of this Approach to Coping in Sport instrument are defined as follows: Emotional calmness referred to tests or attempts to have control of negative emotions by means of thoughts, physical symptoms and technique this strategy is geared; Active planning/Cognitive restructuring, this is referred to attempts to give a new meaning to an adverse situation and to organize thoughts and actions to achieve a particular goal and this strategy is problem oriented; Mental Withdrawal, focuses on the thought of acceptance in the face of perceived inability to achieve a goal, this is an avoidant strategy; Risk-taking behaviors, is focused on the assumed utilization of techniques and skills beyond performance levels referring to the maximum level of available resources to obtain a goal, and this strategy is problem-oriented and Seeking Social Support refers to the athlete's need for close interpersonal relationships in difficult times and is oriented to emotional control.

The procedure consisted of making the digital questionnaires in Google Forms and the questionnaire was launched on social networks and by invitation to some coaches, so that the athletes could respond online, since, due to the confinement, they were not in person at the facilities where they usually trained, however, thanks to the interest of the coaches and the athletes themselves, their participation in this study was possible. It is worth mentioning that in the questionnaire they were informed of the details of their participation such as informed consent, as well as the anonymity of their answers and that they would only be used for scientific research purposes, respecting the moment in which they wished to withdraw from the study. Therefore, they were free to leave the study at any time they wished, and if there were any questions, a WhatsApp number was provided where they could communicate with any questions at any time.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was performed with the statistical package SPSS version 25, the descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation and frequencies were calculated, the internal consistency by means of Cronbach's alpha of the evaluation instruments and correlation analysis was performed to confirm the existence of Spearman's correlations between the resistant personality variables and the coping approach variables in sport.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the frequencies of the various sports to which the athletes belong and who participated in this study.

Box 1

Table 1

Frequencies of sports participating in this study

	Sports	Frequencies
1	Swimming	9
2	Taekwondo	8
3	Soccer	6
4	Cheerleading	5
5	Diving	4
6	Field Hockey	3
7	Triathlon	2
8	Modern Pentathlon	1
9	Gymnastics	1
10	Baseball	1
11	Track & Field	1
12	Chess	1
	Total	42

NOTE: self-authored table

Table 2 presents the reliability or internal consistency by means of Cronbach's alpha of the components of the resilient personality and the approach to coping in sport, showing mostly adequate results above .70, and some evidenced moderately adequate values.

Box 2

Table 2

Cronbach's alpha reliability of the variables of the Resilient Personality and Approach to Coping with Sport questionnaires.

	Variables	Reliability
1	Control	0.85
2	Commitment	0.60
3	Challenge	0.70
4	Total Hardiness	0.85
5	Cognitive Restructuring	0.74
6	Mental Withdrawal	0.70
7	Emotional Calm	0.50
8	Seeking Social Support	0.84
9	Risky Behaviors	0.60

NOTE: self-authored table

Table 3 [See Annexe 1] presents the results of Spearman's correlation matrices, showing the relationship between resilient personality control and mental withdrawal approach to coping in sport with a value of $r = .584$ [$p < .05$] only.

The objective of this research was to identify correlations between resilient personality factors and coping approach factors in sport, finding a positive and significant relationship in resilient personality control and mental withdrawal, under conditions of confinement in the Covid-19 pandemic. The perception of control lowers stress through the acceptance of the situation, since there is nothing I can do to solve it since it is a global problem, therefore, the acceptance that the plans must stop and therefore the goals and objectives as well, without causing emotional imbalance, thus contributing to emotional health. This result is unprecedented, since similar conditions had not been presented by the pandemic and being high-level athletes the results are new knowledge, however we can partially find results that share similar evidence with our research as is the work of Sepúlveda-Páez, Díaz-Karmelic and Ferrer-Urbina [2019], since in a research with water polo players they found that this variable of mental withdrawal, helps to balance the emotions through the decrease of stress and the acceptance of difficult situations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant adverse impact on the mental health of college students and the main coping strategy adopted by students is problem-focused coping by seeking social support from their friends, family and university unlike our results [Falasifah, Fitria, & Hakim, 2021]. In other research conducted in pandemic times, in athletes of rhythmic gymnastics, athletics, soccer, tennis, taekwondo, basketball, volleyball, they found correlations different from our results as they found correlations in emotional calm, cognitive restructuring and behavioral risk [Iancheva, 2021].

In another research, unlike our results, in golfers were studied the coping strategies used and what they found is that they use the strategy of social support, those amateur athletes who have a better performance [Pinto, and Vázquez, 2013]. Different from our results in a research in skiers, the coping strategy used by athletes is risk behaviors [Sarries and Pinto, 2016].

Conclusions

The existence of a relationship between the control variable of the resistant personality and mental withdrawal of coping approach in sport is confirmed, that is to say, in a situation of confinement they took with acceptance and awareness that all the activities directed towards their objectives should wait until the health alert was lifted, taking this control measure with responsibility in favor of a healthy mentality and waiting for health indications, to resume their activities gradually. Considering that due to the nature of the pandemic there was not much they could do, although it is an avoidant coping strategy, a strategy that is not usually found in the mental map of the high performance athlete.

It is worth mentioning that the strategies to face a problem, the athletes decide to do it in a positive way, practically take things as they come and face to solve the problem, since it is a characteristic that they are regularly exposed to stress and do not turn the problems around, they simply solve, but being this time so different from normal situations, it is considered an atypical result, typical of the consequences and stressful emotional blows, given the circumstances of confinement and stress in the face of uncertainty and trying to preserve their health.

The athletes in this sample lived a very strong stressful situation when experiencing confinement, but being athletes their own ability to constantly measure themselves and be in the midst of stressful situations, they have strengthened their resistance to problems in such a way that their ability to solve them led them to use effective strategies, but controlled to a problem that perhaps for others would mean, However, for these retired athletes, it meant evolving to isolation, performing activities in an autonomous and digital way, which in the end allowed them to continue with their current activities, without this meaning uncertainty, stress or worse, problems caused by stress such as insomnia, colitis, gastritis, or psychological problems such as fear, anxiety, panic, etc. Therefore, mental strength and resistance to stress are elements present in this sample in the face of a problem for which there was no control, such as the COVID-19 confinement.

Therefore, being a retired athlete leaves a mark of greater resistance to stress and an evident tolerance to problems, and facing with greater security and calm the difficult situations that may arise to these retired athletes, then, having practiced sport has given them different tools for everyday life and allowing them to maintain mental health, balance and a more accurate decision making under stress.

Declarations

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no interest conflict. They have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the article reported in this article.

Author contribution

Ponce-Carbajal, Nancy: Supervision general leadership of the research group

Ramírez-Nava, Rubén: Conceptualization, Formulation of the objectives and general goals of the research.

Durazo-Terán, Luis Alberto: Review and critique, comments and editing of the manuscript.

De La Cruz-Ortega, Manuel Francisco. Analysis and confirmation of results, methods and analysis of conclusions.

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