

# Competitive anxiety in grassroots sport in the Balearic Islands

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## COMPETITIVE ANXIETY IN GRASSROOTS SPORT IN THE BALEARIC ISLANDS

KEYWORDS: Competitive anxiety, Grassroots sport, Parental influence, Performance.

ABSTRACT: In this investigation, the relation between youth footballers' sportive anxiety and management behaviours, pressure, support, comprehension and active participation from their parents is analysed in their children sport events. One hundred and seventy-six youth football players who belonged to U-15 2nd division league of the Balearic Islands, with an average age of 14.26 years, (SD= .48) have participated voluntarily with this study during the 2016/17 season. To analyse the psychological variables, the Spanish version adapted of Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS-2) and the Parental Involvement in Sport Questionnaire (PISQ) were given to the athletes. The results show differences among values of the three elements of the competitive anxiety: somatic, which promotes losing concentration and worry about the performance, but no significant relation was found about parents influence.

Nowadays, young people who practice sports show higher levels of self-esteem, emotional regulation, competences of problems resolution, aims realisation and social abilities in comparison with young people who do not practice any organised sport (Holt and Neely, 2011). These activities make possible that young people learn how to compete and cooperate one another. Furthermore, these tasks promote the development of the capacity to live together with the victory and the defeat (Smith and Smoll, 1996; Vilela and Gomes, 2015).

Smith and Smoll (1990), note that facing adversities and physical and psychological exigencies, young people develop important attitudes related to personal realisation, the acceptance of the authority and they also learn how to be persistent. On the other hand, it becomes crucial to mention that the junior sportive practice could generate various results; and due to this fact, investigators are showing their interests about it. Most researchers are focused on studying the way which athletes live the challenges and exigencies that wrap the sportive environment; as for instance those studies, which demonstrate that junior sport, can be associated with negative consequences to athletes' comfort. This fact is associated by authors with low self-esteem, the development of aggressive behaviours connected with low cooperation goodwill, to compete using unsporting attitudes and excessive anxiety connected with high pressure from different socialization sports agents; as coaches or parents (Côté and Hay, 2002; Eklund and Cresswell, 2007; Tremayne and Tremayne, 2004).

Nevertheless, anxiety is one of the most common emotional states that can be observed in competitive sport. This phenomenon is understood like an inadequate adaptation of an

individual and specific situation, which increases the activation level and modifies the functioning of the emotions (Urta, 2014). The anxious reaction is referred to a negative emotional state that is characterized by a high activation of nervous system levels, stress, worries and self-orientation; which are cognitions that can alter the attention processes and other cognitive functions (Cervantes, Rodas and Capdevila, 2009).

Different investigations conducted in the field of the competitive anxiety, have determined the existence of personal and situational elements related with the appearance of the previous competition anxiety. These studies point that do not only exist personal elements related to the appearance of the anxiety around the achievements, but that also could come occasioned by different situations; such as the type of sport or the complexity of that activity (Cervelló, Santos-Rosa, Jiménez, Nerea and García, 2002).

Exploring the sportive ambit, it is important to emphasize that two levels of response have been established for the anxiety concept. Such levels are called somatic anxiety and cognitive anxiety (Molina, Sandín and Chorot, 2014; Ramis, Torregrosa, Viladrich and Cruz, 2010). The somatic anxiety is formed by changes created in the autonomic nervous system, as for example the acceleration of cardiac and breathiness rhythm, sweating, gastric movements and muscle hypertension. This physical aspect of the anxiety is the result occasioned by the increase of the physiologic excitation (Cheng, Hardy and Markland, 2009).

Equally important is that various psychological manifestations such as fear, panic, restiveness, obsessions, changes referred to the concentration and attention, catastrophic intrusive thoughts or dread which form the cognitive anxiety

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(Cervelló, Santos-Rosa, Jiménez, Nerea and García, 2002). As Smith, Smoll and Schutz (1990) mentioned, the cognitive anxiety remains divided into two components. The first component is the worry associated with a low performance, and the second is the lack of attention; like, for instance, how difficult is for an athlete to pay attention to a concrete task (Grossbard, Smith, Smoll and Cumming, 2009; Ponseti, Vidal, Cantalops and García-Más, 2017).

Moreover, it becomes relevant to highlight that the directional component of anxiety depends on various factors, as it happens with all the previous and temporal response patrons to the anxiety, the competition's nature (Hanton, Jones and Mullen, 2000; Ponseti, Sesé and García-Más, 2016) and the anxiety's nature treated like a function of gender and the technical abilities of the athlete (Ponseti et al., 2016; Tsopani, Dallas and Skordilis, 2011). Additionally, it would be crucial to mention that athletes who practice contact sports, individual sports and those who are judged subjectively have more cognitive anxiety than athletes who practice sports where sportsmen are judged objectively, practice team sports or sports with inexistent contact (Ponseti et al., 2016). On the other hand, there are some investigations, which have not found significant differences based on gender, age or different sportive modalities (Hanton, Cropley and Lee, 2009; Pozo, 2007).

Focusing on the youngest athletes, it is important to underline that those children who present high competitive anxiety levels are more often worried about committing fails, playing poorly or losing matches than those young athletes who have lower anxiety levels. These kids are also more worried about how they will be evaluated by their coaches, their teammates and their parents (Ponseti et al., 2016).

Parents generate a motivational environment that influences on the beginning, the maintenance and the abandonment of their sons' sportive career. Furthermore, they also contribute to model their personalities, their motivational orientation, self-efficacy and self-esteem (Ponseti et al., 2016).

Referring directly to the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1977a, 1977b, 1979, 1992), it is important to highlight that the environment is understood like a group of structures, where each one can be within the next structure. Thus, Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1977a, 1977b, 1979, 1992) considered that the ecological environment circumscribed the subject; this fact originated that the author considered the human development as a progressive accommodation between an active human and his nearest contexts, which are constantly varying its form. Apart from this, it is important to underline that this process was influenced by the close relations established between the nearest contexts and furthest contexts in which the same contexts are included (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Torrico, Santín, Menéndez-Álvarez and López, 2002).

Although, the quality of the parent-child relationship is an important predictor of the anxiety and the enjoyment level of young athletes (Ponseti et al., 2016), parental behaviours have been investigated much less than the existent relationship between athletes and their coaches. The motivational climate created by parents has been studied by various authors, who have indicated that the promotion of a compromise context with parents tasks has more positive results in sportive experiences of their children than the promotion of a climate based on egocentric attitudes (Ponseti et al., 2016; Torregrosa, Sousa, Viladrich, Villamarín and Cruz, 2008).

On the basis of the foregoing considerations and due to the relationship of parents and the sportive context of their children is often criticised (Dorsch, Smith and Dotterer, 2016; Jellinek and Durant, 2004), the main purpose of the present research is to evaluate the relation between competitive anxiety of young athletes and the influence of their parents.

Dorsch, Smith and Dotterer (2016) pointed that a better knowledge of parents' implication on this environment has become a necessity. In addition, it is worth pointing out different investigations performed about competitive anxiety, which are very relevant because of their impact on young athletes performance (Dorsch et al., 2016; Neil, Hanton, Mellalieu and Fletcher, 2011; Ponseti et al., 2017; Ramis et al., 2010).

## Method

### Participants

This investigation has involved the participation of 176 young footballers who belong to U-15 category in Mallorca's island (Spain). These athletes were between 14 and 16 years ( $M = 14.26$  years,  $SD = .48$ ). It is important to highlight that they trained an average of 6 hours per week, and all of them competed regularly during 2016-2017 season. Furthermore, it must be mentioned that the number of young athletes who were 14 years old and collaborated with the study was 135; who constituted 76.7% of the total. Thus, the number of young athletes who were 15 years old was 37; constituting 21% of the total. And, finally, the number of young footballers who were 16 years old was 4; constituting 2.3% of the total.

### Instruments

The competitive anxiety was measured using the Spanish adaptation (*Escala de Ansiedad Competitiva*, SAS-2, Ramis et al., 2010) of Sport Anxiety Scale 2 (SAS-2). Sport Anxiety Scale 2 consists on three scales of five items, which are used to measure three factors: somatic anxiety, worry and altered concentration. Each item was answered by a Likert scale of four points with a range between Nada and Mucho. The reliability (alpha) of subscales SAS-2 was: .60, .84 and .72, respectively, and .81 for the total qualification that is referred to the general anxiety. These results show an intern acceptable consistency as it occurs in the total score and in subscale levels, and its reliability is quite similar to the reliability found in original SAS-2 (Smith, Smoll, Cumming and Grossbard, 2006): .84, .89, .84 y .91, respectively.

Furthermore, the parental involvement was studied using a sportive questionnaire (PISQ), Lee and Mclean (1997). This questionnaire has 20 items grouped in three factors: managerial behaviour, support and comprehension, and active participation. This tool also contains an additional indicator of a unique element to measure the pressure. Cronbach alfa's values were obtained of .87, .67 and .61 for the three respective factors. These results are quite like values obtained by Lee and MacLean (1997): managerial behaviour (.82), support and comprehension (.60) and active participation (.66).

The parental influence in their children's sportive participation was measured using (*Cuestionario de Implicación de los Padres en el Deporte*), that is the version and adaptation in Spanish (Torregrosa, Sousa, Villamarín, Vilches, Viladrich and Cruz, 2005) of parents' participation.

## Procedure

Firstly, it becomes important to highlight that the permission to perform this investigation was obtained by the local government (*Govern de les Illes Balears*). This study belong to one of the parts of a project of the Balearic Islands Government called *Posam Valors a l'Esport*. Afterwards, clubs management teams and parents of the twelve chosen teams gave us the permission; which was crucial to begin the investigation. The participants were informed about the confidentiality of the obtained data, accepting to participate voluntarily in the study.

Questionnaires (SAS-2 and PISQ) were completed at the beginning of 2016-17 season, 30 minutes before a training session in a period estimated by the coach who was contacted previously. One of the researchers was at the football clubs stadiums during the questionnaires realisation to solve the possible doubts that could appear. The average duration to complete the questionnaires was around 20 minutes.

## Data Analysis

First of all, the average and the standard deviation were calculated of every variable. Afterwards, ANOVA was executed to evaluate the differences between competitive anxiety punctuations and parental involvement; and then correlations were done between these variables. All the statistics analysis were done using the statistic program SPSS21 (IBM Corporation, 2012).

## Results

The results of the anxiety scales and parental involvement appear in the Table 1. The worry anxiety shows the highest values and the global anxiety is at low levels. On the other hand, parental attitudes of support obtain more punctuation along with managerial behaviours and parental involvement. Moreover, it becomes relevant to underline that pressure shows a lower level (see Table 1).

Correlations between anxiety scale and parental involvement appear in the Table 2. The anxiety correlates negatively with parental support and comprehension. On the other hand, managerial behaviour correlates positively with perceived pressure; and this at the same time, correlates positively with somatic anxiety and distraction anxiety. Finally, active involvement of parents correlates positively with managerial behaviour (see Table 2).

## Discussion

Considering the main aims of this investigation, the results show that worry anxiety is the one, which punctuates higher; if this worry means to be more involved and it does not affect negatively to their performance, it can be considered as positive.

Table 1. Study of Anxiety Averages (SAS-2) and Parental Involvement (PISQ).

|                           | X (DS)     | F(p)         |
|---------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Somatic anxiety           | 1.52 (.49) | .77(.668)    |
| Worry Anxiety             | 2.69 (.71) | 1.70(.077)   |
| Distraction Anxiety       | 1.47(.46)  | .85(.586)    |
| Overall Anxiety           | 1.87(.41)  | 1.07(.382)   |
| Support and Understanding | 3.75(.83)  | .51(.894)    |
| Active Involvement        | 2.86(.90)  | 2.09(.024) * |
| Managerial Behaviour      | 3.03(.88)  | .65(.780)    |
| Perceived Pressure        | 2.46(1.37) | 1.06(.392)   |

Table 2. Pearson correlations matrix between Study of Anxiety Averages (SAS-2) and Parental Involvement (PISQ).

|                           | Active Involvement | Managerial Behaviour | Perceived Pressure | Somatic anxiety | Worry Anxiety | Distraction Anxiety | Overall Anxiety |
|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Support and Understanding | .377**             | .318**               | -.049              | -.311**         | .121          | -.362**             | -.191*          |
| A. Involvement            |                    | .435**               | .166               | .074            | -.006         | .032                | .020            |
| M. Behaviour              |                    |                      | .493**             | .011            | .128          | .059                | .095            |
| P. Pressure               |                    |                      |                    | .220*           | .047          | .303**              | .209            |
| Somatic anxiety           |                    |                      |                    |                 | .321**        | .538**              | .743**          |
| Worry Anxiety             |                    |                      |                    |                 |               | .273**              | .787**          |
| D. Anxiety                |                    |                      |                    |                 |               |                     | .726**          |
| Cheating                  | 1.03               | 1.80                 | .94                | 1.99            | 1.02          | 9.11                | (< .003)        |
| Gamesmanship              | 1.07               | 2.42                 | 1.01               | 2.67            | 1.06          | 16.05               | (< .000)        |

Note: \* $p = .00$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Referring to the impact (positive, neutral or negative) of anxiety levels related to the performance, the most important topic is the athlete's opinion about his or her own anxiety; independently that the athletes express themselves through somatic shifts, distraction or thoughts of worry (Montero, Moreno, González, Ponce, Pulido, González and Cervelló, 2012).

The values of the three components of the competitive anxiety are not high, including the perceptions of somatic changes, distraction and worry about the performance. General anxiety is not perceived as high, and neither existed a difference between training situations and competition; due to these athletes train a large number of hours per week.

Most investigations about parents' participation in sports of their children, always implicate the existence of any grade of pressure, and this parental pressure produces negative effects in psychosocial results of their children's sport (Bois, Lalanne and Delforge, 2009, O'Rourke, Smith, Smoll and Cumming, 2011). In contrast with the studies cited earlier, in this research there is no evidence that parents' pressure produces negative effects neither on athletes' worry anxiety nor in overall anxiety. However,

there is evidence that parents' pressure produces negative effects on athletes' distraction anxiety and somatic anxiety.

Hitherto, it must be highlighted that worry anxiety is the most relevant because it can disrupt basic health needs as sleep, and at the same time, it can affect the athletes' performance. García-Más et al. (2011) pointed that worry anxiety appeared as the most perceived in their research about football players with a mean age of 9.45 years. This fact confirm that is easier for younger football athletes to be affected by worry anxiety than for U-15's players, who show in the present study that parental pressure do not affect their worry anxiety.

One of the main limitations of this investigation is the age range to do a wider intergroup comparison, as well as analyse other kind of sport and the participation of girls in the sample. It will be interesting for future investigations to analyse if there are any interactions between motivational environment created by parents, coaches and teammates, and if these interactions can affect to the competitive anxiety and, in consequence, to the athletes' performance (Ramis, Torregrosa, Viladrich and Cruz, 2013).

#### LA ANSIEDAD COMPETITIVA EN EL DEPORTE DE BASE EN LAS ISLAS BALEARES

PALABRAS CLAVE: Ansiedad competitiva, Deporte base, Influencia parental, Rendimiento.

RESUMEN: En el presente estudio analizamos la relación entre la ansiedad deportiva de jóvenes futbolistas y los comportamientos de gestión, la presión, el apoyo, la comprensión y la participación activa de sus padres en los acontecimientos deportivos de sus hijos. Se han estudiado 176 futbolistas federados pertenecientes a la categoría cadete 2ª regional de las Islas Baleares, con una edad media de 14.26 años, (DE = .48 ) durante la temporada 2016/17. Para analizar las variables psicológicas, se les administró a los jugadores atletas se les administró la versión española adaptada de la Escala de Ansiedad Deporte (SAS-2) y el cuestionario sobre la Participación de los Padres en el Deporte (PISQ). Los resultados muestran diferencias entre los valores de los tres componentes de la ansiedad competitiva: somática, promotora de la desconcentración y de preocupación por el rendimiento; pero no se encontró ninguna relación significativa en la influencia de los padres.

#### ANSIEDADE COMPETITIVA EM ESPORTES DE BASE NAS ILHAS BALEARES

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ansiedade Competitiva, Desporto de formação, Influência Parental, Desempenho.

RESUMO: No presente estudo analisámos a relação entre a ansiedade desportiva de jovens futebolistas e os comportamentos gerenciais, a pressão, o apoio, a compreensão e a participação ativa parental é analisada nos eventos desportivos dos seus filhos. Participaram no estudo 176 futebolistas federados pertencentes à categoria 2º cadete regional das Ilhas Baleares, com média de idade de 14,26 anos (DP = 0,48) durante a temporada 2016/17. Para analisar as variáveis psicológicas, os atletas receberam a versão adaptada para espanhol da Escala de Ansiedade no Desporto (SAS-2) e do Questionário de Envolvimento Parental no Desporto (PISQ). Os resultados mostram diferenças entre os valores dos três componentes da ansiedade competitiva: somático, perturbação da concentração e preocupação com o desempenho; mas nenhuma relação significativa foi encontrada na influência dos pais.

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