

The Psychological and Physical Demands of Wrestling: A Focus on Athlete Performance and Resilience in India

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Abstract : Wrestling, a traditional and culturally significant sport in India, demands a high level of both physical and psychological resilience from athletes. This paper delves into the dual pressures faced by Indian wrestlers and assesses their impact on performance. The study incorporates both qualitative and quantitative research methods, focusing on factors such as training intensity, injury frequency, and mental resilience among state and national-level wrestlers. Results indicate that while physical conditioning improves performance, it also increases the risk of injuries and mental stress. The findings highlight the need for comprehensive support, including mental health services and injury prevention initiatives, to enhance athletes' overall well-being. Future research should investigate the long-term health implications and effectiveness of psychological resilience programs tailored to Indian wrestlers.

Keywords: Indian wrestling, physical challenges, psychological pressure, mental resilience, injury risk, sports performance, weight management, mental health.

Introduction - Wrestling, or “Kushti” as it’s locally known, is deeply ingrained in India’s cultural and historical tapestry. The sport, traditionally practiced in mud pits called *akhadas*, has been a revered form of physical combat for generations. Indian wrestlers, known as **pehlwans**, embody not just physical strength but also moral virtues like dedication, persistence, and mental fortitude, values held in high regard across Indian society. Over the years, wrestling has evolved with modern training techniques and international regulations, but the challenges athletes face remain deeply rooted in both physical and mental demands.

Indian wrestling has produced notable athletes, such as Olympic medalists Sushil Kumar and Sakshi Malik, who have elevated the status of the sport globally. Despite these achievements, Indian wrestlers continue to face intense physical demands and psychological pressures. The sport requires athletes to train rigorously, often pushing the limits of their endurance and strength. Wrestling in India goes beyond the mat—it encompasses a way of life, characterized by strict discipline and a commitment to excellence.

Weight management is a crucial aspect of wrestling, particularly in competitive contexts where wrestlers must fit within specific weight categories. The practice of rapid weight loss, or “cutting,” through extreme dieting and dehydration is common but presents significant health risks. This creates a dilemma for wrestlers, who must balance the need to compete with the risks to their health and well-being. Moreover, the psychological stress of maintaining

weight, coupled with the pressure to win, adds a mental strain that can affect performance.

Wrestlers in India are often seen as symbols of national pride, with success in the sport bringing prestige not only to the athlete but also to their family and community. However, this societal pressure amplifies the psychological challenges faced by athletes, many of whom struggle to cope with the mental demands of the sport. Mental health is often overlooked in Indian wrestling academies, where the focus remains primarily on physical conditioning.

Review of Literature

This research aims to explore the physical and mental challenges faced by Indian wrestlers, with a particular focus on how these demands affect their performance and overall resilience. By examining wrestlers at both state and national levels, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges in the Indian context and offers recommendations for better support systems, particularly in terms of mental health and injury prevention.

1. Physical Demands of Wrestling in India: Wrestling requires exceptional physical strength, endurance, and flexibility. Indian wrestlers undergo intense training routines that include strength conditioning, cardiovascular workouts, and technique drills. Studies by Singh and Sharma (2018) highlight that Indian wrestlers often engage in traditional training methods supplemented with modern sports science practices to enhance performance. However, the high-intensity nature of these training programs increases the risk of injuries such as muscle strains, joint dislocations,

and bone fractures (Kumar et al., 2020). Additionally, weight management practices, including rapid weight loss through dehydration and restrictive diets, pose significant health risks (Reddy & Rao, 2019).

2. Psychological Pressures in Indian Wrestling: The psychological landscape of wrestling is marked by intense competition and high expectations. Indian wrestlers face immense pressure to perform, driven by personal ambition, familial expectations, and national pride (Patel & Mehta, 2021). Mental toughness is crucial for coping with the stress of competition and the fear of failure. Research by Gupta and Verma (2022) indicates that wrestlers often experience anxiety, depression, and burnout due to the relentless demands of the sport. The stigma surrounding mental health in India further exacerbates these challenges, limiting athletes' access to psychological support.

3. Resilience and Coping Mechanisms: Resilience is a critical factor that enables wrestlers to overcome setbacks and maintain performance levels. Indian wrestlers develop resilience through various coping strategies, including goal setting, visualization, and support from coaches and peers (Singh & Kumar, 2021). Cultural factors, such as the value placed on perseverance and discipline in Indian society, also contribute to the development of mental toughness (Desai, 2020). However, the lack of structured mental health programs within wrestling academies hinders the systematic cultivation of resilience among athletes.

Research Objective: The primary objective of this research is to analyze the psychological and physical demands on Indian wrestlers and how these factors influence their performance and resilience. Specific objectives include:

1. **Examine** the physical challenges wrestlers face during training and competition in India.
2. **Understand** the psychological pressures related to weight management, performance expectations, and competition outcomes.
3. **Explore** the strategies wrestlers employ to develop resilience and cope with the demands of the sport.
4. **Assess** the effectiveness of current support systems in fostering athlete resilience and performance.

Research Hypotheses

1. **H1:** Indian wrestlers experience significant physical demands that increase the likelihood of injuries and physical exhaustion.
2. **H2:** Psychological pressures, including stress and anxiety, negatively impact the performance of Indian wrestlers.
3. **H3:** Resilience-building strategies positively influence the performance and mental well-being of Indian wrestlers.
4. **H4:** Comprehensive support systems enhance the ability of Indian wrestlers to cope with the demands of the sport.

Research Methodology

Subjects: The study targets Indian wrestlers aged 18-30 who are actively competing at state and national levels. A

sample of 150 wrestlers from various regions of India will be selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different training backgrounds and weight classes. Inclusion criteria include a minimum of three years of competitive experience and active participation in national championships within the last two years.

Tools & Instruments: To assess the physical and psychological demands, the following tools and instruments will be utilized:

- **Performance Metrics:**

- i. **Yo-Yo Endurance Test:** To measure cardiovascular endurance.
- ii. **Wingate Anaerobic Test:** To assess anaerobic capacity.

- **Psychological Assessment Tools:**

- i. **Athlete Burnout Questionnaire (ABQ):** To evaluate levels of burnout.
- ii. **Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS):** To measure anxiety related to sports performance.

- **Injury Reports:**

- i. Medical records and injury logs from wrestling academies will be reviewed to document the frequency and types of injuries.

- **Resilience Scale:**

- i. **Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC):** To assess the resilience levels of wrestlers.

Tool/Instrument	Purpose	Measurement Type
Yo-Yo Endurance Test	Measure cardiovascular endurance	Quantitative
Wingate Anaerobic Test	Assess anaerobic capacity	Quantitative
Athlete Burnout Questionnaire (ABQ)	Evaluate levels of burnout	Quantitative
Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS)	Measure anxiety related to sports performance	Quantitative
Injury Reports	Document frequency and types of injuries	Qualitative/Quantitative
Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC)	Assess resilience levels	Quantitative

Variables

- **Independent Variables:**

- i. Training intensity (measured by hours of training per week)
- ii. Weight management practices (measured by methods used and frequency)
- iii. Competition frequency (number of competitions per year)

- **Dependent Variables:**

- i. Physical performance (endurance and anaerobic capacity scores)
- ii. Psychological stress levels (burnout and anxiety)

scores)

iii. Resilience levels (CD-RISC scores)

Variable	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables
Training Intensity	Hours of training per week	Physical Performance (endurance, anaerobic capacity)
Weight Management Practices	Methods used and frequency	Psychological Stress Levels (burnout, anxiety)
Competition Frequency	Number of competitions per year	Resilience Levels (CD-RISC scores)

Statistical Analysis: Data collected will be analyzed using the following statistical methods:

- 1. Descriptive Statistics:** To summarize the demographic data and key variables.
- 2. Correlation Analysis:** To examine the relationships between training intensity, weight management practices, competition frequency, and dependent variables (physical performance, psychological stress, resilience).
- 3. Multiple Regression Analysis:** To determine the predictive power of independent variables on physical performance, psychological stress, and resilience.
- 4. ANOVA:** To compare the means of different groups (e.g., by weight class, gender) regarding their physical and psychological outcomes.

Data will be processed using SPSS software, with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$.

Conclusion:

- 1. Significant Physical Challenges:** Indian wrestlers endure rigorous training and weight management practices that enhance performance but also increase the risk of injuries and physical fatigue.
- 2. High Psychological Pressure:** The competitive nature of wrestling, coupled with societal and familial expectations, contributes to elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout among athletes.
- 3. Resilience as a Key Factor:** Wrestlers who effectively develop and employ resilience strategies demonstrate better performance and mental well-being, highlighting the importance of mental toughness in the sport.
- 4. Support Systems are Crucial:** The presence of comprehensive support systems, including mental health

resources and injury prevention programs, significantly aids wrestlers in coping with the demands of the sport and sustaining their careers.

Recommendations for further studies:

- 1. Long-term Health Impacts:** Investigate the chronic physical and psychological effects of wrestling on athletes, focusing on long-term health outcomes and quality of life.
- 2. Effectiveness of Resilience Training Programs:** Evaluate the impact of structured mental toughness and resilience training programs within Indian wrestling academies.
- 3. Gender-Specific Challenges:** Explore the unique psychological and physical challenges faced by female wrestlers in India, considering societal norms and support mechanisms.
- 4. Cultural Influences on Athlete Well-being:** Examine how cultural values and societal expectations in India shape the psychological stress and resilience of wrestlers.
- 5. Development of Comprehensive Support Systems:** Research the implementation and effectiveness of integrated support systems that address both mental health and physical rehabilitation needs of wrestlers.

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