

White Paper: Two-Day Sport Psychology
Conference

“MIND THE GAP 2024”

15-16th March 2024

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Acknowledgment

We would like to thank Dr. Nanaki J. Chadha, co-founder of INSPA Sport Psychologists' Association, for taking the initiative to develop and collate this White Paper of our 1st conference "Mind The Gap 2024". We would also like to thank all our team-members for all the contribution- Keerthana Swaminathan, Maurelle D'Sa, Varadayini Gorhe, Parth Parasher, Dr. Sanika Divekar, Mudit Krishnani, Parinaaz Irani, Disha Mussadi, Jaini Nandu and Shaneela Gharat. We appreciate the support and encouragement that was provided to us by Amit Gupte, Nilesh Kulkarni and Rasika Kulkarni and the whole IISM team during the conference, and also to write the White Paper

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Introduction

In the rapidly evolving field of sports psychology, it is imperative for professionals, enthusiasts, and stakeholders to stay updated with the latest research, methodologies, and practices. To address this need, the Indian Sport psychologists’ Association (INSPA) alongside International Institute of Sports & Management (IISM) were pleased to organize the two-day sport psychology conference “Mind The Gap” in Mumbai. The conference aimed at fostering dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collaboration among experts, practitioners, and enthusiasts in the field of sport psychology.

This white paper outlines a proposed format for a two-day sport psychology conference. It includes a detailed agenda, session descriptions, and objectives aimed at facilitating knowledge sharing, networking, and professional development among attendees.

Conference Details

Theme: Landscapes in Sport Psychology in India

Dates: 15th-16th March 2024

Location: International Institute of Sports & Management (IISM), Mumbai, India.

Organizers: Indian Sport psychologists’ Association (INSPA) and International Institute of Sports & Management (IISM).

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Objectives

1. To provide a platform to exchange ideas and insights in the field of sports psychology.
2. To showcase cutting-edge research, methodologies, and best practices.
3. To facilitate networking and collaboration among professionals and enthusiasts.
4. To inspire and empower attendees to enhance performance and well-being in sports through psychological principles.

Conference Overview

DAY 1: 15th March 2024

Opening Remarks and President's Address: Keerthana Swaminathan

The presidential address at the Indian Sports Psychologist Association's (INSPA) inaugural conference highlighted the promising beginning of a platform aimed at elevating sports psychology in India. It emphasized the importance of ethics, community engagement, research, and education in advancing the field. The address called for bridging the gap between theory and practice and stressed the link between mental well-being and athletic performance. This marked the start of a new era of collaboration and innovation in India's sports sector.

Session 1: Keynote Address

- Title: The Emerging Field

- Speaker: Dr. Chaitanya Sridhar

- Objective: Through personal on-field experience of the speaker, we explore the importance of connection with clients (athletes, coaches, etc) and the role of the unconscious narratives that impacts athletic performance, and the scope to unravel and incorporate these narratives into our practice.

In her insightful talk, Dr. Chaitanya Sridhar explored the psychological facets of athletic excellence using the metaphor of a mountain and its reflection to illustrate the conscious and unconscious aspects of an athlete's journey, exemplified by Neeraj Chopra's path to Olympic gold. The mountain's peak symbolizes visible triumphs, such as winning medals, while its reflection in the water represents the unseen efforts and struggles. She challenged traditional motivation by emphasizing unconventional methods that tap into the unconscious mind, sharing the story of a swimmer who broke national records through self-reflective motivation.

Dr. Chaitanya highlighted the importance of a sports psychologist's presence and energy, advocating for inspiring athletes to dream big. She recounted staying calm to help an anxious athlete, demonstrating the effectiveness of mirroring desired behavior. Her experience with psychologist Ken Ravizza underscored the value of personal connections for support and safety, reinforced by Simone Biles' withdrawal from the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, which highlighted the importance of mental health in sports.

To conclude, she stressed the necessity of maintaining professional boundaries and practicing self-care to prevent burnout, essential for sustained effectiveness in sports psychology. Her talk offered invaluable insights for athletes, coaches, and psychologists alike.

Session 2: Workshop

- **Topic: Ethical Foundations: Crafting a Code of Conduct in Applied Sport Psychology**

- **Speaker:** Dr Sanika Divekar & Mudit Krishnani

- **Objective:** Comprehensive exploration of ethical considerations and the development of a robust code of conduct in applied sport psychology. Launch of the INSPA Ethical Code of Conduct.

The workshop offered a comprehensive examination of ethical principles and their application in sports psychology. The participants engaged in discussions and activities designed to identify and address common ethical dilemmas encountered by professionals in the field. The session underscored the necessity of establishing a robust ethical framework to guide practice and ensure the well-being of athletes and clients. The event culminated with the launch of the INSPA Ethics and Code of Conduct document. The attendees left with an enhanced understanding of ethical issues in sports psychology and practical tools for navigating these challenges. The introduction of the INSPA Ethical Code of Conduct marked a significant advancement in promoting ethical practices within the profession, providing practitioners with clear and comprehensive guidelines.

Session 3: Panel Discussion

- **Topic: Breaking Barriers: Navigating Mental Health in Sport – A Comprehensive Exploration in Sport Psychology**

- **Panelist:** Nicole Menezes, Nilesh Kulkarni & Mugdha Bavare

- **Facilitator:** Mudit Krishnani

- **Objective:** Explore, dissect, and provide in-depth insights into navigating the complex landscape of mental health in the realm of sports.

Main objectives of the panel included destigmatizing mental health, adopting an integrated approach to holistic wellbeing, understanding athletes' narrative, discussing preventative measures to maintain mental health and develop supportive environments and systems around and for the athlete.

The panelists highlighted the growth in awareness and acceptance of mental health in sports over the past 20-25 years, but noted that more progress is needed. Innovative approaches and strategies such as interactive methods, open discussions, and influential athletes sharing their experiences were discussed to destigmatize mental health. Further, emphasis was placed on proactive communication, policies, and support systems to promote mental health. In addition, the importance of mental health literacy and education in sports management and support staff was underscored as crucial for fostering future acceptance and understanding.

To conclude, the panel discussion focused on destigmatizing mental health in sports, suggested holistic well-being approaches, and emphasized on the importance of athlete narratives.

Session 4: Workshop

- Topic: Nurturing the Nurturers: A Workshop on Self-Care Strategies for Sport Psychologists

- Speakers: Keerthana Swaminathan & Dr. Sanika Divekar

- Objective: Understand the barriers and stigmas of seasoned Sport Psychologists; subsequently establish self-care habits and refine and deepen their existing strategies.

The workshop addressed the importance of self-care in ensuring the well-being of sports psychologists and emphasized self-care's role in managing stress, preventing compassion fatigue, and promoting personal growth.

The session identified common barriers to self-care, such as cultural expectations, professional norms, and misconceptions. Self-care was categorized into physical, emotional, social, and professional domains, with specific examples provided for each. The session outlined strategies for developing a personalized self-care tool-kit, including identifying personal needs, setting boundaries, and seeking support.

To conclude, the workshop highlighted that prioritizing self-care is essential for both personal well-being and professional effectiveness. By addressing barriers and cultivating a personalized self-care routine, sports psychologists can sustain their own well-being while empowering athletes.

Session 5: Workshop

- Topic: Mastering the Mind: Application of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) in Sports.

- Speaker: Dr Nanaki J. Chadha

- Objective: Introduction to the intervention of REBT, and provide insights into the application of REBT in the realm of sport psychology to help navigate individuals through the competitive situations more effectively.

The workshop addressed the highly competitive nature of sports, which often fosters unhealthy and irrational thinking, and introduced participants to Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT). This intervention allows athletes to alter their unhealthy cognitions and navigate challenging performance situations more effectively.

The workshop emphasized the notion that *“people are disturbed not by things, but by their view of them.”* For instance, it is not the competition or underperformance that causes anxiety or disappointment among athletes, rather their perception of these events. Participants were introduced to the ABC[DE] framework of REBT to help them challenge and change unhelpful thoughts.

The key strategies covered during the session included rational restructuring using three disputation questions and the THINK acronym to help participants reframe negative thoughts. To enhance understanding, the presenter used articles and athlete interviews to illustrate different ways of thinking and their impact on performance. The session concluded with practical caveats for applied practitioners to consider during their sessions with athletes.

Session 6: Workshop

- Topic: Navigating Diversity: The Interplay of Social Inequality, Gender, and Sexuality in Athlete Well-being.

- Speaker: Gauri Shringarpure

- Objective: Focused on the exploration of the unique challenges faced by athletes with diverse identities, shedding light on the impact of social inequality on their mental health.

Gauri Shringarpure’s talk on sports psychology delved into the complexities of gender, sexuality, and mental health, aiming to enhance understanding of these interconnected areas. As a dedicated gender-sexuality trainer and queer affirmative counselor, Ms. Gauri highlighted the unintended injustices faced by LGBTQI individuals and stressed the need for education and inclusivity.

In an engaging session, she introduced “The Charm Circle” concept, which examines societal norms around relationships. The discussion also addressed the unique stressors faced by the LGBTQI community, including invisibility, relationship challenges, the journey to self-acceptance, coming out risks, and prevalent discrimination and harassment, especially in sports. She noted the small number of LGBTQI individuals in sports, with about 80% of LGBTQI athletes not disclosing their identity to coaches due to fear of being perceived as inauthentic.

She advocated for an affirmative approach to mental health, emphasizing the recognition and appreciation of differences in sexuality and gender. She underscored that distress is socially located rather than inherent, stressing the need to acknowledge systemic oppressions and use privilege to support marginalized communities. Framing mental health as a crucial social justice issue, Ms. Gauri offered practical tips for fostering inclusivity, such as using inclusive language, creating safe spaces, avoiding stereotypes, continually educating on LGBTQI issues, standing

against discriminatory behavior, and supporting clients by validating their identities and maintaining confidentiality.

To conclude, her talk not only shed light on the struggles of the LGBTQI community but also empowered the audience with actionable steps to create a more inclusive and supportive environment, urging everyone to help break down barriers and promote mental health as a vital component of social justice.

DAY 2: 16th March 2024

Session 1: Workshop

- Topic: From Insight to Enterprise: Mastering the Sport Psychology Consultation Process and Building a Successful Practise

- Speaker: Amit Gadkari & Varadayini Gorhe

- Objective: Importance of process in the professional development of business and sport psychology practice.

The workshop focused on two main aspects for becoming a successful sports psychology practitioner in India: (a) professional development and (b) business development. It gathered insights from the audience on the challenges faced by practitioners and the essential skills required to excel in the field. The workshop stressed upon the importance of following the right educational pathway, particularly obtaining a Master's degree in sport psychology. Additionally, it highlighted the need to identify personal and professional values to develop a strong practicing philosophy. Further, it emphasized on the importance of reflective practice for continuous professional development. In addition, the workshop emphasized the need for practitioners to adapt to different scenarios, continuously upgrade their knowledge and skill-set, and establish protocols tailored to the different sports, competitive levels, and varying locations.

To conclude, the workshop underscored the importance of continuous upskilling for sports psychologists, encompassing both professional and business aspects of sports psychology.

Session 2: Panel Discussion

- Topics: Mindful Partnerships: Unveiling the Role of Stakeholders in Sport and the Crucial Impact of Mental Health on Athlete Support.

- Panelist: Deepthi Bopaiah, Dr Chaitanya Sridhar, G. Rajaraman & Shiva Keshavan

- Facilitator: Dr Sanika Divekar

- Objective: Explore the significance of mental health literacy and awareness among various stakeholders, emphasizing the collaborative efforts required to create an environment that prioritizes mental health within the field of sport psychology.

The panel discussion comprehensively explored the intricate interplay between mental health and athletic performance. Facilitated by experts Deepthi Bopaiah, Dr. Chaitanya Sridhar, G. Rajaraman, and Shiva Keshavan, the dialogue underscored the imperative for heightened mental health literacy and awareness among all stakeholders in the sports ecosystem.

The discussion emphasized the necessity for a collaborative approach, where coaches, sports psychologists, administrators, and athletes themselves engage in proactive measures to foster an environment conducive to mental well-being. Dr. Sridhar highlighted the psychological stressors unique to athletes, advocating for integrative support systems that address these challenges. Bopaiah brought attention to the role of organizational policies and the need for institutions to prioritize mental health alongside physical training.

Keshavan, drawing from his experience as an athlete, illustrated the tangible benefits of robust mental health support, noting improvements in performance and overall life satisfaction. Rajaraman's insights into the media's role in shaping public perceptions of athlete mental health further reinforced the multifaceted nature of the issue.

To conclude, the panel ended with a consensus on the critical impact of mental health awareness in sports. By equipping stakeholders with the necessary tools and knowledge, the sports community can ensure a holistic support system that not only enhances athletic performance but also safeguards the mental well-being of athletes. This discussion serves as a pivotal step towards integrating mental health as a core component of sport psychology and athlete support frameworks.

Session 3: Keynote Address

- Topics: Redefining Pressure: Lessons from Iconic Athletes on Sports Psychology and Mental Health

- Speaker: Boria Mazumdar

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- Objective: Highlight the crucial role of sports psychology in addressing mental health challenges faced by athletes and para-athletes.

In his talk, Boria Majumdar, a distinguished sports journalist and historian, discussed various aspects of sports psychology through powerful stories and examples of notable athletes and para-athletes. Mr Majumdar highlighted the journey of Sachin Tendulkar, illustrating how he redefined pressure and turned it into a driving force, demonstrating the importance of acceptance in mental health. Abhinav Bindra's experience at the Rio Olympics showcased the significance of focusing on the process rather than the outcome, emphasizing control over one's mindset. He also recounted the inspiring story of Devendra Jhajharia, who overcame the lack of resources with innovative solutions and achieved Olympic glory, underscoring the challenges and resilience of para-athletes. He stressed the need to view athletes and para-athletes as equal parts

of a whole, reflecting a holistic approach to sports. The talk further explored the broader impact of sports on mental health, societal change, and the unique challenges faced by Indian athletes compared to their Western counterparts.

To conclude, the keynote concluded by emphasizing the critical role of sports psychologists in breaking the heroism pattern and providing meaningful support to athletes, highlighting their potential to foster a better society through sports.

Session 4: Panel Discussion

- Topics: Synergies in Action: Integrating Sport Science Support for Optimal Sport Performance.

- Panelist: Dr Harini Muralidharan, Dr Janki Deole, Ramji Srinivasan, & Shiny Chandran.

- Facilitator: Varadayini Gorhe

- Objective: Discuss and demonstrate the effective integration of sport science disciplines, providing valuable insights for practitioners, researchers, and enthusiasts in the field.

The panelists, experts from various domains of sport science including nutrition, strength and conditioning, sport medicine, and sport psychology, began by discussing the challenges faced by the sport science field in India. A recurring theme was the lack of educated professionals in the field. Ramji Srinivasan emphasized on the importance of ethical practice through proper education, urging professionals to focus on their expertise without encroaching on the roles of coaches or other support staff.

The panel also addressed common challenges faced by athletes. The panelists highlighted the issue of inadequate research, which undermines trust in Indian sport science professionals. Shiny Chandran noted the preference for international foods like avocados over local options due to the lack of rigorous research. Dr Harini Muralidharan pointed out that several athletes follow international trends and influencers rather than local recommendations, creating a significant educational gap among coaches and athletes. Dr Janki Deole added that while sport psychology in India is growing, finding qualified professionals within the field remains a challenge due to a non-rigorous approach to education in psychology.

In addition, the panelists emphasized on the requirement of sport psychologists across other disciplines. Sport psychologists can play an important role in addressing myths around eating that could result in eating disorders. Also, help athletes during their rehab for them to return to sport post-injury successfully.

To conclude, the panelists agreed on the need and importance for collaboration among sport science professionals to advance athletes development. They emphasized the importance of

evidence-based research, the development of sport science protocols suited for the Indian context, and the generation of Indian case-studies and norms.

Session 5: Workshop

- Topics: Ethics Unveiled: Navigating the Approval Process for Sport Psychology Research in India

- Speaker: Dr Neeta Tatke

- Objective: Demystify the ethical approval process for sport psychology research in India.

Dr. Neeta Tatke delves into the evolution and profound impact of competitive sports on physical, psychological, and emotional well-being. From ancient times to modern spectacles like the Olympics, sports have unified cultures and ignited national pride. Since the formal inception of the Olympics in 1876, with its guiding motto “Citius, Altius, Fortius” (Higher, Faster, Stronger), competitive sports have continually advanced. The pursuit of athletic excellence has driven various controversial strategies, including early biochemical analyses, genetic theories, and nutritional innovations, often raising ethical concerns. She mentioned some notable examples including doping scandals involving athletes such as Kornelia Ender and Ben Johnson.

Dr. Tatke’s research emphasized the transformative power of sports, particularly in traditional Indian disciplines like Mallakhamba, demonstrating improvements in executive functions and emotional intelligence among participants. She also mentioned that the ethical challenges in sports psychology are underscored by historical incidents such as Nadia Comăneci’s 1979 performance with an injury and Maradona’s contentious “Hand of God” goal in 1986, prompting reflections on fairness and integrity in sports.

To conclude, Dr. Tatke highlighted that while sports foster competition, they also embody the values of sportsmanship and resilience. The story of Martina Navratilova, exemplified by Chris Evert’s gesture of solidarity, epitomizes true sportsmanship - a testament to the enduring lessons sports impart about unity and the human spirit.

Session 6: Paper and Poster Presentation

- Facilitators: Dr Nanaki J. Chadha & Dr Neeta Tatke

There were six oral presentations that were a part of the conference. The following are the topics that were presented.

1. Beyond the Scoreboard: A Sectional Study on Competitive Sports Anxiety in Football Players **Speaker: Vaishali Chaudhary**
2. Psychosocial Experiences of Menstrual Dysfunctions Among Athletes **Speaker: Ritu Verma**

3. The Effects of Social Comparison in Athletes: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Body Image and Motivation among Indian and American Competitive Swimmers. **Speaker: Malavika Vishwanath**
4. Effect of Autogenic Training on Mood States of Sportspersons in Manipur. **Speaker: Karn Kunte**
5. Understanding challenging experiences faced by female athletes in Sports during menstruation. **Speaker: Payal Gore**
6. Effect of selected Psychological Strategies Training on the Psychological Performance of Batsmen in Cricket. **Speaker: Ram**

There were two poster presentations that were a part of the conference. The following are the topics that were presented:

1. Grit and Task and Ego Orientation in Sports among Athletes between Ages 12-20. **Presented by: Aadit Ingle**
2. The effects of instructional and motivational self-talk on gaze behaviour in a virtual reality setting. **Presented by: Sahil Pawade**

Conclusion

The two-day sport psychology conference “Mind The Gap” offered a structured and immersive experience for attendees to delve into the intricacies of psychology in sports. By providing a combination of presentations, workshops, and networking opportunities, such conferences contribute to the professional growth and development of individuals involved within the field of sports psychology and allows the field to grow further.

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