

Role of Sports Participation in Enhancing Happiness and Subjective Well-Being Among Young Adults

Dr. Samiksha Nayak¹

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Abstract:

The objective of this research study was to investigate and compare the levels of happiness between athletes and non-athletes. A comparative research design was employed for this purpose. The sample consisted of 500 participants drawn from two groups: athletes (n = 250) and non-athletes (n = 250), selected from Devi Ahilya University, Indore (M.P.). Happiness was measured using the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the 'Mann-Whitney U test' at a significance level of 0.05. The results revealed that the level of happiness among athletes (M = 121.41, SD = 4.88) was significantly higher compared to that of non-athletes (M = 117.65, SD = 3.11). The Mann-Whitney U test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two groups (U = 16050.00, Z = -9.43, p = 0.001). The findings suggest that participation in sports is deeply associated with higher subjective well-being and psychological happiness. The study concludes that regular participation in sports activities enhances emotional stability, mental health, and life satisfaction.

Keywords: Happiness, Athletes, Non-athletes, Subjective Well-being, Physical Activity and Mental Health.

Introduction:

Over a specific timeframe, happiness can be understood as the balance between positive and negative emotional experiences, wherein both are evaluated based on their intensity and duration. Happiness or overall well-being can be understood as the balance between positive and negative emotional experiences, wherein a preponderance of positive emotions over negative ones signifies greater happiness. This subjective interpretation largely aligns with our everyday understanding and provides a practical foundation for analysis in research studies (Ng, 2022). Happiness has long been regarded as the ultimate goal of human life. Philosophers such as Aristotle have described it as the supreme good something sought for its own sake while Sigmund Freud emphasized that individuals continuously strive throughout their entire lives to attain and maintain happiness (Singh et al., 2023). Happiness is considered a fundamental element of overall well-being and quality of life. In psychological research, it is typically regarded as a key component of 'subjective well-being, which encompasses life satisfaction, the experience of positive emotions, and the minimal presence of negative emotions (Diener, 1984). Individuals who participate in sports or engage in athletic activities generally report feeling happier than those who do not. The link between playing sports and experiencing happiness is quite strong, and this connection becomes even more robust when people participate more frequently. This suggests that sports are not only beneficial for physical health but also directly enhance an individual's happiness and overall well-being (Rachel Altman et al., 2021). Activities that combine physical movement with social interaction play a pivotal role in predicting happiness and overall well-being. Participation in sports contributes to this process, as it not only

¹ Director, Panchakanya handloom Multitrade Company, 361, A Shri Mangal Nagar, Kanadia Road, Indore, Madhya Pradesh, 452016(India). Email: anusam2810@gmail.com

enhances physical functioning but also enriches social relationships and environmental experiences; thus, it exerts a positive influence on an individual's happiness (Dolan et al., 2008). Numerous research studies indicate that regular physical activity plays a significant role in enhancing not only physical but also emotional well-being. Various studies have revealed that people often experience an immediate improvement in their mood following exercise; this includes an increase in energy and vigor, as well as a reduction in feelings of fatigue and anxiety (Millet & Giulianotti, 2019). Passively engaging in sports particularly as a spectator can be an effective way to enhance happiness among the elderly. Watching sports is often easier than actively participating and requires less physical exertion; consequently, it serves as a practical option for promoting well-being within this age group (Kawaguchi et al., 2025).

Review for Research Study:

1. A study conducted by Bae in the year 2022 based on data from the 2020 Korea National Leisure Activities Survey examined the relationship between participation in sports-related recreational activities, happiness, and overall recreational life satisfaction among individuals aged 15 and older. Using a large and representative sample, the analysis revealed that individuals involved in sports-related recreational activities reported significantly higher levels of happiness and satisfaction than those who engaged in non-sports activities. Furthermore, satisfaction levels varied significantly based on various demographic and socioeconomic factors, including type of sport, age, education, marital status, and household income. These findings suggest that sports participation plays a significant role in enhancing subjective well-being.
2. Using data collected from 242 participants, Kim (2016) examined the impact of participating in sports, watching sports, and consuming sports media on subjective well-being; this study yielded a total of 2,746 responses over a nine-week period. The results revealed that both sports participation and sports spectatorship have a distinctly positive effect on both initial and momentary happiness; this effect is primarily mediated through the fulfillment of psychological needs such as autonomy, achievement, relatedness, and recovery. In contrast, consuming sports media yielded mixed results, exerting both positive and negative influences on well-being. Among the psychological factors, autonomy and achievement were found to be the most influential in enhancing happiness, suggesting that active engagement in sports contributes more consistently and substantially to overall well-being.
3. A research study conducted by Littlejohn et al., in the year 2016, study aimed to develop and validate a measurement tool for assessing happiness in the context of sport events, applying it to two non-mega events: the Ontario Summer Games (OSG) and the Ontario 55+ Summer Games (55+ SG), along with a control group of residents unaware of these events. Happiness was measured using a structured instrument comprising 1 item for overall happiness, 3 items for life satisfaction, and 8 items for affect (3 positive and 5 negative). The findings, based on ANOVA analysis, indicated that residents aware of the 55+ SG reported significantly higher levels of happiness and satisfaction compared to the control group, along with lower negative emotions than both the OSG and control groups. However, the study found limited evidence that different types of sport events produce distinct effects on residents' happiness, suggesting the need for further research incorporating socio-demographic and contextual factors.

4. A study by Bruno S. Frey and Anthony Gullo investigated in the year 2021, the causal relationship between sports participation and happiness using longitudinal data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP). The results showed a significant positive association between engagement in sports and life satisfaction, with stronger effects observed among younger and older individuals, as well as those in poorer health. The study further revealed a bidirectional relationship; however, the causal impact of sports participation on happiness was approximately four times greater than the reverse effect. These findings highlight the strong contribution of sports participation to enhancing subjective well-being.
5. The research study conducted by Peráčková and Peráček in the year 2023, the relationship between sports participation and happiness among adolescents was examined using the EPOCH questionnaire. The findings revealed statistically significant differences in key dimensions of well-being such as engagement, perseverance, optimism, connectedness, and happiness between boys and girls who were active in sports versus those who were inactive. Significantly, the results indicated that participation in sports at any level was associated with greater happiness compared to non-participation, regardless of the intensity of the activity. Specifically, adolescents who participated in sports approximately six times a week reported the highest levels of happiness and demonstrated significantly better overall well-being compared to their inactive peers; this highlights the strong positive role of regular sports participation in adolescent happiness.
6. A study conducted by Dieudonné Mignamissi, Eric Xavier Possi Tebeng, Aristophane Djeufack Dongmo, and Laquintine Mama Nji Mboumbouo in the year 2025, examined the relationship between football performance and national happiness using cross-sectional data from 118 countries. To ensure the robustness of the results, the study employed several econometric techniques, including OLS, Two-Stage Least Squares (2SLS), GMM2S, IVTOBIT, and Censored Quantile Regression. The findings revealed a positive and significant relationship between a country's FIFA points particularly following participation in the FIFA World Cup and its reported levels of happiness. These results suggest that success in football contributes to enhancing collective well-being at the national level.
7. A study by D. S. Goswami (2016) investigated the impact of various types of sports on happiness among university athletes. This study involved 90 participants (mean age = 21.12 ± 2.31 years), who were equally divided into three groups: team sports, aquatic sports, and combat sports ($n = 30$ in each). Happiness was measured using the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a one-way ANOVA, with a significance level set at 0.05. The results revealed that athletes participating in team sports reported significantly higher levels of happiness compared to those involved in aquatic and combat sports. The findings suggest that team sports contribute more effectively to enhancing life satisfaction, self-esteem, positive mood, and overall subjective well-being, while also helping to reduce negative emotions, thereby fostering long-term happiness.
8. In a study by Huang and Brad R. Humphreys in the year 2012, utilizing data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (2005–2009), the relationship between participation in physical activity and self-reported happiness in the United States was examined. Employing instrumental variable (IV) estimation and incorporating County Business Patterns data, the study found that individuals residing in areas with greater

access to sports facilities were more likely to engage in physical activities and reported higher levels of life satisfaction. The results also indicated that both men and women derived increased happiness from participating in these activities, although the positive impact was comparatively stronger for men, this highlights the significant role played by the surrounding environment and physical activity in enhancing individual well-being.

9. A randomized controlled study conducted by Ravari and colleagues (2020) investigated the effects of Pilates exercises on happiness and depression in 60 elderly women. These women were divided equally into two groups: an intervention group (n = 30) and a control group (n = 30). The intervention group participated in Pilate's sessions three times a week for eight weeks, while the control group engaged in no such activity. Happiness and depression were assessed using the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) and the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) at baseline, one month later, and two months later, the data were analyzed using a mixed ANOVA. The results of the study revealed that, over time, happiness levels increased significantly and depression scores decreased in the intervention group compared to the control group. This suggests that the regular practice of Pilates can effectively improve the mental health of the elderly.

Methodology:

Research Design: The present study employed a comparative research design to examine the differences in happiness levels between athletes and non-athletes. This approach was appropriate, as it allowed for the comparison of two independent groups based on a key psychological variable namely, happiness.

Participants: The sample consisted of 500 young adults, including 250 sportspersons actively participating in organized sports and 250 non-sportspersons with no regular involvement in sports activities. Participants were drawn from the Department of Physical Education as well as other departments of Devi Ahilya University, Indore (M.P.), and only those who willingly consented were considered for inclusion in the study.

Sampling Technique: For this research study, a purposive sampling method was employed to select participants based on their level of engagement in sports activities. Individuals regularly involved in sports training, competitions, or structured physical activities were classified as sportspersons, while those without such involvement were categorized as non-sportspersons.

Tool Used for Data Collection: Happiness was measured using the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ), developed by Michael Argyle and Peter Hills. This is a well-known instrument used to assess happiness and overall well-being. The questionnaire comprises statements related to life satisfaction and positive emotions, to which participants respond based on their own experiences. The total score reflects an individual's level of happiness; the higher the score, the greater the perceived happiness.

Procedure of Data Collection: Data were collected by giving the questionnaire directly to the participants. They were first informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses

would remain confidential and used only for research. After taking their consent, the questionnaire was given, and they were asked to answer honestly. Enough time was provided to complete it.

Statistical Analysis: The data collected for the study was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, such as the mean and standard deviation, were calculated to examine the happiness levels of both players and non-players. Since the assumption of normality was not fully satisfied, a non-parametric Mann–Whitney U test was applied to determine whether any significant difference existed between the two independent groups. The level of significance for all statistical analyses was set at 0.05.

Hypothesis of the research study: There is no significant difference in happiness levels between individuals who are involved in sports and those who are not.

Objective of the research study: The objective of this research study was to compare the levels of happiness between players and non-players.

Results:

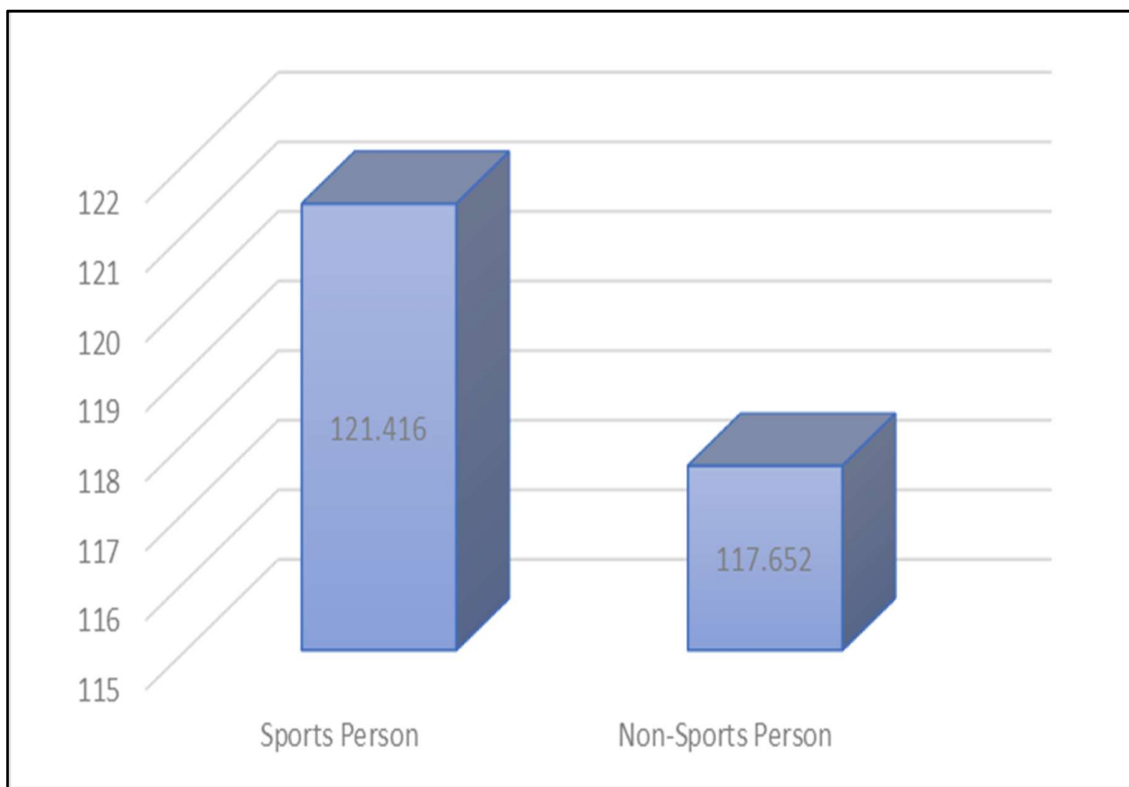


Figure: 1 Bar graph showing comparison of average happiness scores between players and non-players.

The figure presented in Figure 1 offers a visual comparison of average happiness scores between athletes and non-athletes. It clearly demonstrates that the average happiness score of athletes ($M = 121.416$) is higher than that

of non-athletes (M = 117.652). The distinct difference in the heights of the two bars indicates that individuals who engage in sports experience greater happiness compared to those who do not participate in athletic activities.

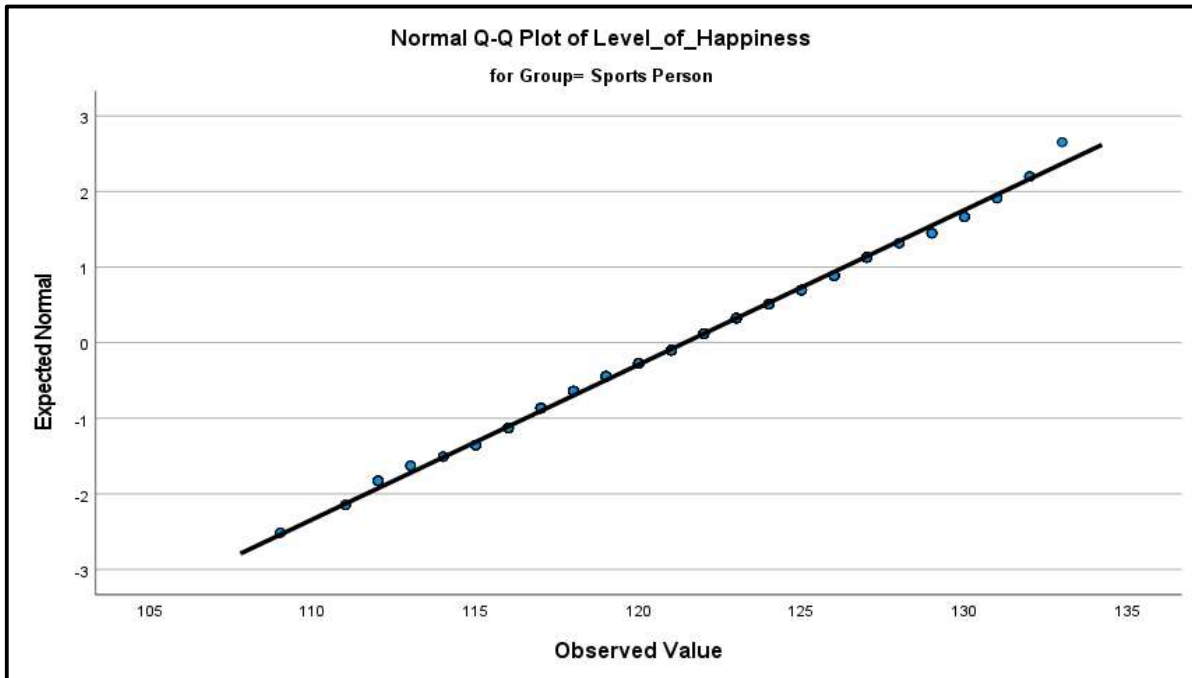


Figure: 2 Demonstration of the normal distribution of happiness scores among players in a Q-Q plot.

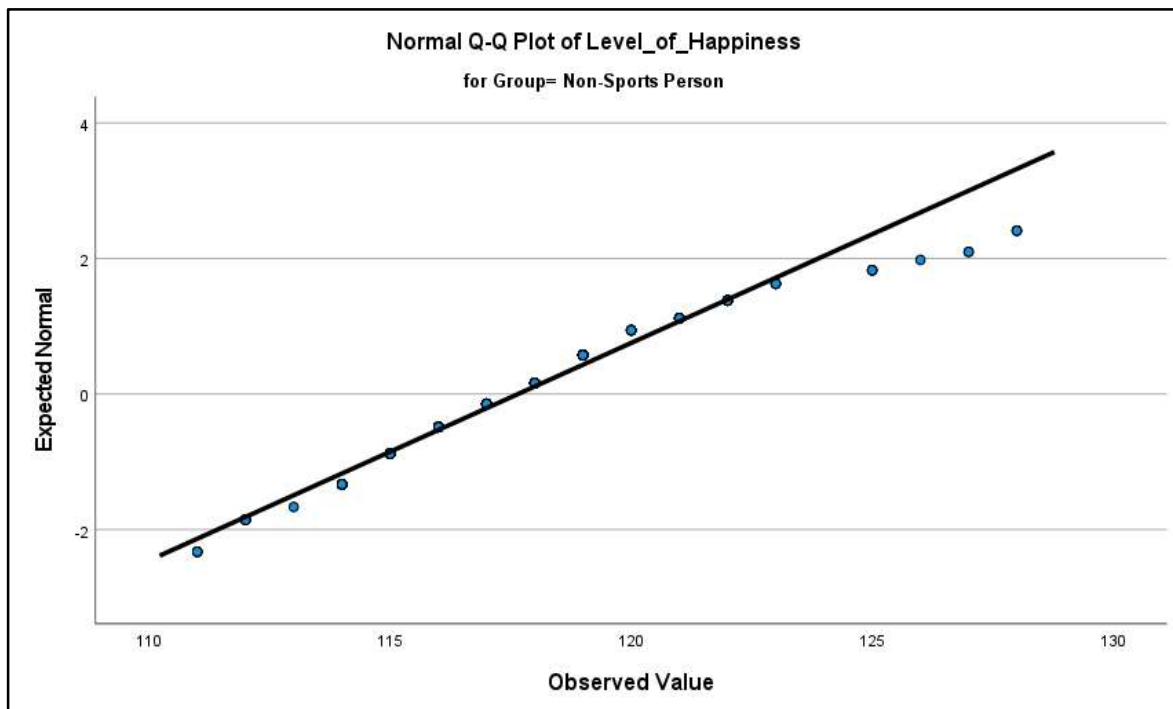


Figure: 3 Demonstration of the normal distribution of happiness scores among Non-players in a Q-Q plot.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Happiness Levels among Sports and Non-Sports Persons.

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Sports Person	250	121.41	4.88	-0.01	-0.35
Non-Sports Person	250	117.65	3.11	0.70	1.20

Table 1. Presents descriptive statistics regarding happiness levels for both groups: players and non-players. The results of the research study indicate that the average happiness score of players (M = 121.41, SD = 4.88) is higher than that of non-players (M = 117.65, SD = 3.11), this finding suggests that individuals who participate in sports experience greater happiness. For players, the skewness and kurtosis values (-0.01 and -0.35, respectively) indicate an approximately normal distribution of scores. In contrast, the non-player group exhibits positive skewness (0.70) and kurtosis (1.20), signaling a slight deviation from normality and a more concentrated distribution of scores around the mean.

Table 2: Mann–Whitney U Test Results for Happiness Comparison.

Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Rank
Sports Person	250	311.30	77825.00
Non-Sports Person	250	189.70	47425.00

Table 2 presents the average ranks and the sum of ranks for both groups in the research study. The results of the study indicate that individuals involved in sports have a higher average rank (311.30) and sum of ranks (77,825.00) compared to those not involved in sports, whereas the non-players have an average rank of 189.70 and a sum of ranks of 47,425.00. This clearly indicates that individuals who participate in sports consistently demonstrate higher happiness scores compared to those who do not engage in any form of sports activities.

Table 3: Mann–Whitney U Test Statistics for Happiness Level

Test	Mann–Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Value	16050.00	47425.00	-9.43	0.001

Table 3 presents the results of a non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test, which was specifically utilized to examine distinct differences in happiness levels between athletes and non-athletes. This test reveals a statistically significant difference between the two groups (U = 16050.00, Z = -9.43, p = 0.001). Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the difference observed in this study is considered statistically significant. These findings confirm that participation in sports is associated with significantly higher levels of happiness compared to non-participation..

Discussion of Findings:

The results of this research study revealed that the level of happiness among athletes ($M = 121.41$, $SD = 4.88$) is significantly higher than that of individuals who do not participate in sports ($M = 117.65$, $SD = 3.11$), and this difference was found to be statistically significant ($U = 16050.00$, $Z = -9.43$, $p = 0.001$). This research study suggests that participation in sports is positively associated with subjective well-being and psychological happiness. This elevated level of happiness among athletes can be attributed to the psychological and physiological benefits derived from regular physical activity; these benefits include improved mood regulation, reduced stress, and enhanced emotional stability facilitated by the release of endorphins and social engagement. These findings align with the views of Diener (1984), who defined subjective well-being as the presence of positive affect and life satisfaction; furthermore, they resonate with the perspectives of Deci and Ryan (2000), who emphasized that the fulfillment of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness contributes to increased happiness. These findings receive further support from Fox (1999), who noted that physical activity is positively correlated with better mental health, additionally, Altman et al. (2021) and Dolan et al. (2008) have highlighted that participation in sports plays a significant role in enhancing happiness through various physiological, psychological, and social mechanisms.

Conclusion:

The conclusion drawn from this research study is that athletes exhibit significantly higher levels of happiness compared to non-athletes. The results of this study ($M = 121.41$ vs. 117.65 ; $U = 16050.00$, $Z = -9.43$, $p = 0.001$) clearly demonstrate that participation in sports has a positive and significant impact on an individual's subjective well-being. Therefore, engaging in sports can be regarded as an effective contributor to psychological happiness, emotional stability, and overall life satisfaction. This study suggests that promoting sports participation among youth and the general public could prove to be a valuable strategy for improving mental health and enhancing the quality of life.

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