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Exploring the link between self-handicapping and self-esteem: a study on sports science students

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Abstract

Introduction. The intricate interplay of self-concept, self-esteem, and strategies for navigating success and failure shapes life's quality. Self-esteem, a dynamic perception of worth, drives aspirations and shields against failure's impact. This dynamic gives rise to self-handicapping, safeguarding self-esteem by attributing failure to external factors. Success is credited to talent, masking effort. This complex landscape resonates across existence, impacting talents, acceptance, and pursuits. Self-handicapping strategies, balancing aspiration and preservation, protect self-esteem. Aim of Study. We aim to investigate self-esteem and self-handicapping levels among sports science students. We seek to uncover their intricate relationship and how it relates to success in this field. Additionally, we will explore how gender, education level, athletic participation, and sport type influence self-esteem and self-handicapping tendencies, providing insights into individuals' self-perceptions and coping strategies. Material and Methods. The study employed the relational survey method to analyze self-handicapping and self-esteem levels among students, gaining ethics committee approval. Descriptive statistics were presented, including mean ± SD scores. Non-parametric tests, Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal–Wallis H, were used due to data distribution. The Self-Esteem Scale (SES) and the Self-Handicapping Scale (SHS) were used. Results. Internal consistency was high ($\alpha = 0.74$ for SES, $\alpha = 0.72$ for SHS). Regarding gender, no statistically significant differences were observed in mean SHS or SES scores. For class, SHS and SES scores differed significantly ($p < 0.001$). Team/individual sport differences had a significant impact on both SHS ($p < 0.01$) and SES ($p < 0.01$) scores. A moderately negative correlation was observed between self-handicapping and self-esteem ($p < 0.001$, $r = –0.499$). Self-esteem explained 10% of the self-handicapping variation. Conclusions. In conclusion, the study provides insights into the relationship between self-handicapping and self-esteem among sports science students. It sheds light on how self-esteem motivations influence self-handicapping behaviors, with potential implications for personal growth and well-being.

KEYWORDS: self-esteem, self-handicapping, sport psychology.

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Introduction

Quality of life, both internally and in relation to the external world, is profoundly shaped by the intricate interplay between self-concept, self-esteem, and strategies individuals adopt to face success and failure. At the core of this interwoven tapestry lies self-esteem – a dynamic perception of one's worth and capabilities that permeates every facet of existence. Individuals driven by aspirations for achievement and self-enhancement are propelled by a promise of success [15]. Conversely, a shadow of failure prompts an instinctual response to shield self-esteem from potential harm [13, 29].

This intricate dance between aspiration and self-preservation gives rise to a phenomenon known as self-handicapping – a complex psychological mechanism through which individuals safeguard their self-esteem when confronted with a specter of failure [8]. The process

involves attributing potential failure to external factors, thereby insulating one's self-worth from a perceived impact of disappointment. In contrast, success is often attributed to inherent talent or exceptional abilities, sometimes overlooking hard work and dedication invested [4]. Self-handicapping is a cognitive and behavioral strategy that individuals use to protect their self-esteem or manage social impressions by creating obstacles or excuses for potential failure in advance [21, 24]. Essentially, it involves erecting barriers or making excuses that can be used to explain poor performance or outcomes, providing a way to preserve one's self-esteem [15].

The foundational work of Jones and Berglas [15], who first contextualized the concept of self-handicapping, is central to this study's exploration. In situations where anticipation of failure looms, individuals strategically attribute their potential failure to external circumstances. This attributional shift aims to prevent negative perceptions from those around them and to safeguard their self-esteem. In moments of success, the attribution reverses, positioning them as possessors of remarkable talents or intellect. This contrast in attribution mechanisms reveals complex ways in which individuals fortify their self-esteem in response to success and shield it from a specter of failure. Tice [27] defined the concept of self-handicapping as a behavior exhibited by an individual when confronted with a threat to their self-esteem, with an aim of preserving or enhancing their self-esteem.

Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation and perception of their own worth, capabilities, and significance. It involves feelings of self-love, self-acceptance, and a positive attitude toward one's abilities and qualities [27]. Development of self-esteem is influenced by personal experiences, social interactions, and a sense of belonging. High self-esteem is associated with feelings of value, confidence, and a positive self-image, while low self-esteem may result in self-doubt, insecurity, and a negative self-perception. Factors such as recognition, achievement, and social acceptance play crucial roles in shaping and maintaining self-esteem [23]. The complex landscape of self-esteem encompasses individual's self-awareness, embracing their strengths and weaknesses, and self-worth [8]. This intricate web of beliefs reverberates across facets of one's existence – reflecting in a demonstration of talents, a sense of accomplishment, acceptance within society, and even embrace of physical characteristics [23]. Self-esteem becomes a critical foundation upon which pursuit of success and avoidance of potential inadequacy are built. Navigating a space between aspirations and self-preservation, individuals resort to self-handicapping strategies to mitigate a risk of negative evaluations [29]. These strategies serve as protective shields against a perception of incompetence or failure, by preemptively providing justifications or excuses. A threat of being perceived as unsuccessful by others can significantly impact self-esteem, spurring individuals to employ self-handicapping tactics [15, 27, 29].

In achievement-oriented societies, an individual's sense of self is intricately entwined with their performance outcomes. Success triggers a cascade of positive effects – an enhanced perception of competence, happiness, pride, and bolstered self-esteem. In contrast, failure's sting can catalyze a decline in self-esteem, and trigger emotional responses like inadequacy, sadness, and shame. Given the far-reaching consequences of performance outcomes, individuals instinctively employ self-protective strategies to shield themselves from an impact of negative results [2, 12]. The symbiotic relationship between self-esteem and self-handicapping is particularly pronounced among individuals with lower self-esteem [21]. A perception of their own capabilities as limited compels them to engage in self-handicapping as a means to sustain a fragile sense of competence [19, 24]. It becomes a strategy to counteract potential negative feedback, preserving semblance of self-worth.

Self-handicapping can manifest in any situation where ability is being assessed. The academic realm, particularly within disciplines like sports sciences, serves as a fascinating microcosm for a study of self-esteem and self-handicapping [29]. A constant evaluation of intelligence and abilities in a pursuit of educational goals provides fertile ground to observe these psychological dynamics in action. Academic self-handicapping, the utilization of excuses to conceal a link between academic performance and personal attributes, unveils complex tactics individuals employ to protect their self-esteem in the face of public scrutiny [6, 28].

Understanding the interplay between these independent variables and the phenomena of self-esteem and self-handicapping holds profound importance. Gender, as a sociocultural construct, often influences the ways individuals perceive themselves and their roles, potentially impacting self-esteem. Gender significantly shapes individuals' self-perception and coping strategies through societal expectations and cultural norms. Coping strategies may be gender-specific, with distinct responses to success and failure based on societal norms. Examining gender in this context

offers insights into how individuals handle societal expectations, which can influence self-perception and strategies for maintaining self-esteem [16]. Education levels provide insights into individuals' self-perception and coping strategies, by influencing their sense of achievement and self-worth. Academic performance and achievements significantly contribute to one's self-esteem. Pressure and experiences within an educational environment shape coping strategies, as individuals may adopt specific behaviors to manage success and failure. Also, it helps understand how academic pressure affects self-worth and influences adoption of coping strategies, shedding light on intricate dynamics between educational experiences and individuals' self-perception [26]. Athletic participation provides insights into individuals' self-perception and coping strategies through the pursuit of excellence and competition dynamics. Engagement in sports often influences self-esteem as individuals strive for success and face the challenges of competitions. Pressure to perform well and meet athletic goals can impact self-worth. Coping strategies in sports may include resilience, teamwork, or focus on individual performance. By examining athletic participation, it is possible to gain insights into how individuals handle demands of sports, which influence their self-perception and coping strategies they employ to manage the highs and lows of competitive endeavors [25]. Differentiation between team and individual sports within the realm of athletic involvement introduces an additional layer of complexity to the self-esteem and self-handicapping equation. Distinctions between team and individual sports show varied dynamics that influence self-esteem. In team sports, individuals may derive self-worth from teamwork and shared success, while individual sports put personal performance in the spotlight. Coping strategies may differ, depending on the type of sport: team sports emphasize collaboration and support, while individual sports require self-reliance. Examining the types of sports provides a nuanced understanding of how these dynamics shape individuals' self-perception, in which team dynamics or individual performance play a significant role, and how coping strategies are tailored to specific challenges associated with the nature of sport [13].

Aim of Study

This study seeks to investigate the intricate relationship between self-esteem, self-handicapping, and the key independent variables among the university students in the Faculty of Sports Sciences at Hitit University. The study explores the dynamics within this specialized academic environment to uncover the implications for individuals pursuing success in sports science academic environments.

Material and Methods

In this study, the relational survey method, which is one of the descriptive methods aiming to determine a relationship between two or more variables [17], was used to examine the levels of self-handicapping and self-esteem among students.

The research was conducted with the written permission obtained from the Hitit University Non-Invasive Research Ethics Committee (number: 2020-23, date: 27.02.2020), ensuring compliance with ethical standards.

Participants

The population of this research comprises students enrolled in the Faculty of Sport Sciences at Hitit University, Türkiye, during the 2019-2020 academic year. A total of 694 university students participated in the study (Table 1).

The athletic engagement of participants was inquired concerning their active involvement in training sessions and competitions within a specific sports discipline.

The class levels of the study participants are as follows: "Freshman" denotes first-year students who have recently commenced their university education; "Sophomore" refers to the second year, "Junior" to the third, and "Senior" to the fourth and final year of undergraduate studies.

Data collection

The Self-Esteem Scale (SES), developed by Rosenberg and adapted into Turkish by Cuhadaroglu [10], was utilized to gather data on the self-esteem levels of the participants. The reliability studies of the scale were conducted on 5,024 high school students in the United States. In measuring self-esteem, Rosenberg emphasized a comprehensive attitude towards self-evaluation. The reliability and validity studies of the SES in Turkey were conducted on a sample group of 205 high school students. There are 10 items on the scale, and it is a 4-point Likert type. The items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 of the scale are reverse coded. The scale items are as follows: "Strongly disagree" (1), "Disagree" (2), "Agree" (3), and "Strongly agree" (4). The items are scored as 1, 2, 3, and 4. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 10, and the highest score is 40, with a low score indicating high self-esteem, and a high score implying low self-esteem.

The Self-Handicapping Scale (SHS), developed by Jones and Rhodewalt, and adapted into Turkish by Akin [1], was used to collect data on the self-handicapping

levels of the subjects. The scale is one-dimensional and a 6-point Likert type. The Turkish version of the SHS demonstrated the internal consistency reliability with a coefficient of 0.90 and the test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.94. The correlation coefficients between items in the Turkish and original forms ranged from 0.68 to 0.90 [1]. The original version of the SHS exhibited the internal consistency reliability with the coefficient of r(503) = 0.79, the test-retest reliability coefficients of r(90) = 0.74 at one-month intervals. The SHS consists of 25 descriptive items, and participants are asked to determine their level of agreement with an explanation in each item. The options to be marked for each item on the scale are: "I totally disagree" (0), "I do not agree" (1), "I partially disagree" (2), "I partially agree" (3), "I agree" (4), and "I totally agree" (5). The items are scored as 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. The items on the scale include a series of self-handicapping behaviors, such as procrastination behaviors, emotional problems, health problems, insomnia, and medication use [1]. The items 3, 5, 6, 10, 13, 20, 22, and 23 of the scale were reverse coded. In the current study, the scores that can be obtained from the SHS range from 0 to 125 [15, 19]. High scores obtained from the scale indicate that the participant's self-handicapping level is high.

Analysis

The descriptive statistics, including the frequencies and the percentages of the subjects, are presented in Table 1. The scores obtained by the subjects from the SHS and the SES are reported as mean ± standard deviation. As a result of the statistical analysis of the data obtained from the SHS and the SES, it was determined that the data did not follow a normal distribution, and therefore, the nonparametric tests were employed. The Mann–Whitney U test was utilized to compare the paired groups, while the Kruskal–Wallis H test was employed to compare the variables of three or more groups.

The internal consistency reliability of the SES and the SHS was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The obtained Cronbach's alpha (α) value for the questionnaire was 0.74 for the SES and 0.72 for the SHS, indicating a high level of the internal consistency among the items.

Research process

The research process began with providing the participants with the thorough explanations regarding the significance and objectives of the study. This initial step aimed to ensure participants' understanding and informed consent. Following this, the standardized scales and questionnaires were printed and distributed among the participants. The data collection phase took place while all participants were present in a classroom setting. It took participants approximately 15 minutes to complete the scales. Subsequently, the collected data were transferred to Excel. The statistical analyses were conducted using the SPSS program to derive findings. The interpretation of the results is presented in the discussion and conclusion sections.

Results

Table 2 displays the scores obtained by the participants. It shows the mean, standard deviation, and median scores of the SHS and the SES.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the participants

Variables	Categories	f(694)	%	SHS Mean ± SD	SES Mean ± SD
Gender	Female	253	36.5	54.08 ± 12.62	33.34 ± 6.18
	Male	441	63.5	54.59 ± 13.36	32.7 ± 6.37
Class	Freshman	216	31.1	56.66 ± 12.21	32.83 ± 6.21
	Sophomore	164	23.6	58.56 ± 12.44	31.12 ± 6.72
	Junior	156	22.5	53.92 ± 12.24	32.55 ± 6.31
	Senior	158	22.8	47.47 ± 13.01	35.32 ± 5.19
Athlete status	Yes	383	55.2	53.95 ± 13.23	33.16 ± 6.17
	No	311	44.8	54.95 ± 12.91	32.64 ± 6.46
Sport type	Team sports	151	39.4	51.79 ± 12.79	34.24 ± 5.72
	Individual sports	232	60.6	55.7 ± 13.14	32.13 ± 6.54

Note: f – frequency, SHS – Self-Handicapping Scale, SES – Self-Esteem Scale, SD – standard deviation

In terms of the gender variable, the mean SHS scores of the female students were found to be lower than the mean SHS scores of the male students. However, this difference was not statistically significant. Similarly, the average SES scores of the female students were higher than the average SES scores of the male students, but the difference was not statistically significant (Table 3). The differences in the SHS and SES scores based on the class variable of the participants were found to be statistically significant (Table 4). The pairwise comparisons were conducted, using the Mann–Whitney U test with the Bonferroni correction ($p < 0.05$ significance level adjusted to $p < 0.0083$ due to four groups) to determine the specific classes between which the differences occurred. The results of the pairwise comparisons can be seen in Table 5.

Table 2. Scores obtained from the SHS and the SES

	SHS	SES
n	694	694
Mean	54.402	32.929
Standart deviation	13.091	6.306
Median	55	35

Note: n – sample size, SHS – Self-Handicapping Scale, SES – Self-Esteem Scale

It appears that the nonathlete students obtained the higher scores on the SHS compared to the students who are athletes. However, the difference in scores between the two groups was not found to be statistically significant. Furthermore, it was found that the scores of the athletes on the SES were higher than those of the nonathletes. However, the difference in the scores between the two groups was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$) (Table 6).

It was discovered that the scores obtained on the SHS were lower for the athletes engaged in team sports compared to the athletes engaged in individual sports, and these differences between the two groups were found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Nevertheless, it was found that the scores acquired on the SES were higher for the athletes involved in team sports than for the athletes who participate in individual sports. In addition, the differences between the two groups were found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) (Table 7).

Table 8 presents the statistically significant, moderate negative correlation ($p < 0.001$; $r = –0.499$) between the self-handicapping and self-esteem levels of the subjects participating in the study.

As a result of the regression analysis, it was found that self-esteem explained self-handicapping at the 10% level (Table 9).

Table 3. The SHS and SES scores according to the gender variable

Scales	Gender	n	Mean rank	Sum of rows	MWU	Z	p
SHS	Female	253	342.28	86597	54466	–0.520	0.603
	Male	441	350.49	154568			
SES	Female	253	360.84	91293.5	52410.5	–1.334	0.182
	Male	441	339.84	149871.5			

Note: n – sample size, MWU – Mann–Whitney U test score, Z – z score, p – significance level, SHS – Self-Handicapping Scale, SES – Self-Esteem Scale

Table 4. The SHS and SES scores according to the class variable

Scales	df	H	p
SHS	3	66.10	0.000*
SES	3	32.61	0.000*

Note: df – degree of freedom, H – Kruskal–Wallis H, p – significance level, SHS – Self-Handicapping Scale, SES – Self-Esteem Scale
* $p < 0.001$

Table 5. Differences between groups according to the class variable

Scales	Classes	n	Mean rank	Sum of rows	MWU	Z	p
SHS	Freshman	216	219.16	47338.5	10225.5	–6.624	0.000*
	Senior	158	144.22	22786.5			
SES	Freshman	216	169.44	36600	13164	–3.798	0.000*
	Senior	158	212.18	33525			
SHS	Sophomore	164	178.26	29235	9879	–3.523	0.000*
	Junior	156	141.83	22125			
SHS	Sophomore	164	197.90	32455.5	6986.5	–7.150	0.000*
	Senior	158	123.72	19547.5			
SES	Sophomore	164	133.69	21925.5	8395.5	–5.489	0.000*
	Senior	158	190.36	30077.5			
SHS	Junior	156	180.78	28201.5	8692.5	–4.516	0.000*
	Senior	158	134.52	21253.5			
SES	Junior	156	138.67	21633	9387	–3.676	0.000*
	Senior	158	176.09	27822			

Note: n – sample size, MWU – Mann–Whitney U test score, Z – z score, p – significance level, SHS – Self-Handicapping Scale, SES – Self-Esteem Scale
* $p < 0.0083$

Table 6. The SHS and SES scores according to the participation in sports variable

Scales	Participation in sports	n	Mean rank	Sum of rows	MWU	Z	p
SHS	Athlete	383	340.35	130352.5	56816.5	–1.044	0.297
	Nonathlete	311	356.31	110812.5			
SES	Athlete	383	353.57	135419	57230	–0.890	0.373
	Nonathlete	311	340.02	105746			

Note: n – sample size, MWU – Mann–Whitney U test score, Z – z score, p – significance level, SHS – Self-Handicapping Scale, SES – Self-Esteem Scale

Table 7. The SHS and SES scores according to the type of sport variable

Scales	Type of sport	n	Mean rank	Sum of rows	MWU	Z	p
SHS	Team sports	151	171.55	25904	14428	–2.918	0.004*
	Individual sports	232	205.31	47632			
SES	Team sports	151	212.93	32153	14355	–3.000	0.003*
	Individual sports	232	178.38	41383			

Note: n – sample size, MWU – Mann–Whitney U test score, Z – z score, p – significance level, SHS – Self-Handicapping Scale, SES – Self-Esteem Scale
* $p < 0.01$

Table 8. The Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient test for the SHS and the SES

		SHS
SES	r	–0.499
	p	0.000*
	n	694

Note: SHS – Self-Handicapping Scale, SES – Self-Esteem Scale, r – Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient, p – significance level, n – sample size
* $p < 0.001$

Table 9. The linear regression analysis results on the prediction of self-esteem by the level of self-handicapping

Predictive variable	B	SE	Beta	t	p	F	Model (p)
(Stable)	2.434	0.146		16.642	0.000*	76.495	0.000*
Self-esteem	0.475	0.054	0.315	8.746	0.000*		

Note: B – unstandardized coefficient, SE – standard error, t – t-value, p – significance level, F – f-statistic, R – 0.315, R2 – 0.10
* $p < 0.001$

Discussion

Based on the data gathered from this study, it was found that the moderate negative correlation exists between the participants' levels of self-handicapping and self-esteem (Table 8). In a study by Coudevylle et al. [7], the participants were informed about the importance of warming up before basketball trials and that insufficient warming up could potentially lead to self-handicapping. Subsequently, the self-esteem assessment was conducted among the subjects. It was observed that the individuals who did not engage adequately in warming up tended to avoid performing at their best. Consequently, the statistically significant, the weak negative correlation was found between self-handicapping and self-esteem. The results indicate that the subjects employ self-handicapping behaviors as a means to protect their low self-esteem. The findings suggest that individuals with low self-esteem may engage in self-handicapping as a strategy to maintain a sense of self-worth or to avoid potential failure. This behavior can be seen as a defensive mechanism aimed at self-protection and maintaining self-esteem. Individuals with a tendency to engage in self-handicapping may create excuses or rationalizations for their poor performance because they have low self-esteem. This behavior serves as a way to protect their self-esteem and avoid facing a possibility of failure or negative evaluations. By attributing their performance shortcomings to external factors or circumstances, they can preserve their self-image and maintain a sense of competence.

In this study, no significant gender differences were found in the self-handicapping and self-esteem scores among the students. Similar findings, that support the results of this study, were identified in literature. For instance, Cosar [7] determined no significant gender difference in self-handicapping. A study conducted by Dorman and Ferguson on 2006 high school students in Australia and Canada revealed no significant gender differences in self-handicapping scores concerning a class environment [11]. Similarly, Barnes [4] reported no relationship between self-handicapping and gender in a study involving 154 male and 172 female students. While some studies, including Kimble et al. [18], have suggested that men engage in more self-handicapping behaviors than women, others, like Hirt et al. [14], have found variations in self-sabotage tendencies based on a context. The latter revealed that, when alone, men exhibited higher self-handicapping scores compared to women, whereas in a group setting, men refrained from self-handicapping to appear successful. Harris and Snyder [12] explored an impact of uncertain self-esteem on self-sabotage, observing that males with uncertain self-esteem practiced less before a test compared to their female counterparts. Additionally, Midgley and Urdan [22] reported higher self-handicapping scores in males than females among 8th grade students. Urdan et al. [29], and Lucas and Lovaglia [20] extended these findings to 5th grade and undergraduate students, respectively, detecting significant gender differences in self-handicapping scores. Furthermore, the experimental

study by Jones and Berglas [15] indicated that men had higher self-handicapping scores than women and were more likely to use performance-impairing substances. Notably, women's potentially lower tendencies to take risks may contribute to their lower self-handicapping scores compared to men [5]. A perception of self and others, along with a role and importance of social status, are crucial factors in a manifestation of self-handicapping behaviors. Lucas and Lovaglia suggest that men in contemporary societies may engage in more self-handicapping behaviors due to their generally higher social status compared to women [20].

The self-handicapping levels of the senior students were found to be lower compared to the other classes, and their self-esteem levels were higher. Yilmaz and Ekinci [30], as well as Altiok et al. [3], conducted research and found statistically significant differences in terms of a class level variable of self-esteem. Accordingly, the research findings indicated that the self-esteem levels of the senior students were higher compared to those of the lower-grade students. The differences in self-handicapping behaviors and the self-esteem levels among the senior students compared to the other class levels could be attributed to the factors such as increased maturity, accumulated experience, reduced peer pressure, and a stronger sense of self. Seniors might be more focused on achieving their educational goals, which boosts their self-esteem and reduces a fear of failure. Improved study skills and mentorship might also contribute to their positive attitude. Additionally, anticipation of transitioning to higher education or a labor market could motivate seniors to prioritize their efforts and avoid self-handicapping behaviors. However, individual variations should be considered, and these reasons might not apply universally.

This study concluded that there was no statistically significant distinction in the self-handicapping and self-esteem levels of the participants based on their status as licensed athletes. Rhodewalt et al. [25], who were the first to test the generalization of Jones and Berglas' [15] research on self-handicapping in sports, conducted a study examining levels of self-handicapping among competitive male swimmers before competitions throughout a season. The researchers monitored training activities and reported instances of illness/injury among the athletes as indicators of self-handicapping. The findings of the study revealed that the individuals with the low self-handicapping scores prior to competitions demonstrated an increase in their training duration and exhibited improved performance. On the contrary, those with the high self-handicapping scores failed to augment their training efforts and experienced a decline in their performance levels. Hausenblas and Carron [13] conducted a study to investigate the association between group cohesion and self-handicapping in male and female athletes. The research findings indicated that the female athletes exhibited the higher self-handicapping scores in comparison to their male counterparts. The self-handicapping obstacles reported by the female athletes included various excuses such as sports-related issues (cancelations of training sessions), excessive time spent studying, illnesses, family or friend problems, work-related challenges, personal problems, disability, and excessive time dedicated to entertainment activities. In this study, it was determined that there was the statistically significant difference in the self-handicapping and self-esteem scores of the students according to the type of sport variable. Specifically, it was observed that the students engaged in individual sports exhibited the higher self-handicapping scores compared to those involved in team sports. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Prapavessis and Grove [24] who discovered that golf players had elevated self-handicapping scores and lower self-esteem scores. The differences observed in the self-handicapping and self-esteem scores between the students participating in individual and team sports may be influenced by various psychological, social, and performance-related factors. These factors might affect how individuals perceive and respond to challenges and setbacks in their respective sports environments. For instance, individual sports often require a higher degree of personal accountability and self-reliance, which may potentially lead athletes to engage in self-handicapping behaviors as a means to protect their self-esteem when facing potential failure. On the contrary, team sports involve shared responsibilities and collective goals, fostering a sense of unity, and potentially reducing an inclination to use self-handicapping strategies. For instance, research conducted by Coudevylle et al. [9], who discovered that basketball players had elevated self-handicapping scores and lower self-esteem scores. Additionally, the competitive nature of individual sports may place greater pressure on athletes to perform exceptionally well, potentially impacting their self-esteem in cases of underachievement. In contrast, team sports may provide a more supportive environment in which athletes' self-esteem is influenced by both individual and team successes. These factors, along with the research findings by Coudevylle et al. [8], and Prapavessis and Grove [24], suggest a complex interplay between sport type, self-handicapping tendencies, and self-esteem levels. Further research could delve deeper into these

factors to provide more comprehensive understanding of a relationship between sports participation, self-handicapping behaviors, and self-esteem.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study establishes the significant negative correlation between self-handicapping and self-esteem, with the particular focus on male athletes. The anticipation of failure among athletes often leads to self-handicapping behaviors, attributing underperformance to academic and sports challenges. To provide more comprehensive understanding and practical implications, future research could explore possible explanations for self-handicapping in this context. Additionally, efforts should be directed toward developing preventive measures and intervention programs adjusted to address the unique challenges faced by male athletes. Further research endeavors can investigate effectiveness of psychological interventions, resilience-building initiatives, or mentorship programs to mitigate self-handicapping tendencies. This approach aims to contribute not only to theoretical knowledge, but also to practical strategies for enhancing mental well-being and performance in athletic communities.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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