

# Fear of failure among college athletes psychology essay



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In sport, motivation and fear of failure are among the vital determinants of an athlete's performance. The current study aims to study the role of gender on the type of motivation and the level of fear of failure among college athletes. The sample would be athletes between the ages of 18 - 25 and who are a part of their college sports team. The Sports Motivation Scale and The Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory would be used to assess the type of motivation and the level of fear of failure respectively, among the participants. Results of the present study will aid in widening the scope of sports psychology and add to the field of psychology as a whole. Further, it will aid in giving an understanding into whether gender differences exist among athletes of Indian origin playing at the university level. Both counselors and coaches will have an insight into how better to ensure that sportspersons are reaching their full potential.

## INTRODUCTION

With the growth of sports psychology, there has been an increased interest in the possible gender differences that exist with regard to sport participation and achievement (Branta, Painter & Keiger 1987). The statement 'Participation in sport is primarily a masculine activity in American society' (Czisma, Wittig, and Schurr, 1988) was stated owing to the number of males over females participating in sport. With regard to the Olympic Games, it was seen that in the year 1908, male athletes outnumbered females 53 to 1. In 1948, the ratio had decreased to 10 to 1. More recently, in 2012, this male female ratio compared to the past may be considered to have reached parity (Laine 2012). For the first time Saudi Arabia sent in two female athletes to compete at the games and statistics

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reveal that the number of females in the U. S team outnumbered the males by 269 women to 261 men. Even with regard to the medal count of the American contingent, the women won almost twice as many medals as the men: 100 total medals as opposed to 59 for the men (Chappell 2012).

One cannot ignore that socio - cultural disparities exist across the world and in a country like India it is often considered that playing sport is not something that women do. Show of muscular strength is considered unladylike or ' masculine' and this may keep girls from playing sports (Shakti 2005). Thereby, the question arises, to what extent do gender differences still exist with regard to sport? It is known that males comprise greater physical strength than women, this is largely on account of males having larger muscle - mass ratio than females (Maughan R J, Watson J S, Weir J 1983). However, do males and females differ on internal factors such as the type of motivation and level of fear of failure? The current study seeks to investigate into this proposed question.

## **Motivation**

Motivation may be understood as a combination of an internal drive that stems from within us and external factors that seek to influence it. The internal drive stemming from within is better known as intrinsic motivation, and may be defined engaging in an activity purely for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from doing the activity (Deci, 1975). A person who is intrinsically motivated, will engage in an activity irrespective of the presence of external materialistic rewards (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Most researchers hold the view that intrinsic motivation may be looked upon as a global construct, Deci, 1975 and White, 1959 however came about with the ideology that <https://assignbuster.com/fear-of-failure-among-college-athletes-psychology-essay/>

intrinsic motivation may be subdivided into three categories - 1) intrinsic motivation to know and understand - here the primary reason for individuals to participate in an activity is to try something new or to learn a novel technique 2) Intrinsic motivation towards accomplishments - here the main intention behind an individual's participation in an activity is for the individual to acquire mastery over a new technique or the accomplishment of goals set by themselves. 3) Intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation - the focus here is sensory pleasure and excitement derived during the course of engaging in the activity. Peak experiences or aesthetic stimulating experiences are a part of this form of intrinsic motivation.

Contrary to intrinsic motivation Deci, 1975 defined extrinsic motivation as those behaviors that are engaged in as a means to an end and not for their own sake. Originally it was thought that this form of motivation could only be influenced by external sources such as rewards. Deci, Ryan, Connell, & Grolnick, in 1990 however felt that extrinsic motivation like intrinsic motivation could also be sub divided into the following forms - 1) External regulation - this refers to behaviours that are controlled by external rewards. 2) Introjections - under this condition, external sources of motivation have been internalized, and internal forces such as guilt or shame serve to act as the drive. 3) Identification - Under this condition the individual recognizes his/her behavior as worthy and of considerable value. Thus, the behavior engaged in is for external reasons but controlled internally by the individual.

The last form of motivation, also known as Amotivation, is similar to learned helplessness (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978). Amotivated

individuals do not recognize a link between their actions and the outcomes, <https://assignbuster.com/fear-of-failure-among-college-athletes-psychology-essay/>

instead they undergo feelings of incompetence and lack of control (Deci, and Ryan 1985). In the case of Amotivation, neither intrinsic motivation nor extrinsic motivation is experienced and the end result may be that the individual ceases to participate in the given activity altogether.

The link between internal and external forms of motivation may be seen in the cognitive evaluation theory formulated by Deci in 1975. This theory talks about the effects of external consequences on internal motivation. The cognitive evaluation theory talks about individual's motivation differing on account of their own perceptions of their ability to meet the desired goal, and the corresponding drive to do so. High levels of competence and self determination, results in increased intrinsic motivation and identification. On the other hand, it is seen that low levels of competence and self determination, results in a decrease in introjection, external regulation and amotivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991). The cognitive evaluative theory is a sub - theory of the self determination theory (SDT), which talks about the factors that drive individuals other than extrinsic rewards or reinforcement. It deals largely with psychological needs and conditions for individual growth which serve to be motivating factors. The extent to which a person is self-motivated or self-determined serves as the basis of this theory (Deci, & Ryan, 2002).

Thus, research has indicated a presence of both internal and external motivating factors that serve to be responsible of the extent to which a person immerses himself or herself in a given task. Further, it is based on these factors that the individual places value on task performance.

## **Fear of failure**

Fear and anxiety are often misinterpreted for one another. Anxiety is generalized and the source is often hard to pinpoint. Fear on the other hand is a subjective emotion that triggers physiological changes (e. g., increased heart rate, muscle tension) and that has antecedents in the environment, leading to certain causal consequences in behavior (Gray, 1987). Fear results in an individual engaging in avoidance behaviours on account of an understanding that avoiding the situation at hand will prevent the unpleasant outcome that is feared from occurring (Barlow, 2002; Field & Lawson, 2003; Gray, 1987). Theorists believe that fear as a construct exists from early childhood to adulthood (Field & Lawson, 2003; Lawson, Banerjee, & Field, 2007; Morris & Kratochwill, 1998). Fears serve an adaptive role during childhood towards real or imagined threat. They warn the individual of dangers that are lurking and motivate the individual to engage in escape or avoidance behaviours. However, on becoming excessive, intense, and persistent over time, fears may result in being extremely distressful thus act as a block towards academic and social progression (Field & Lawson, 2003; Gullone, 1999). Three main forms of fear have been identified among children and adolescents, included are those of performance anxiety, social anxiety, and school phobia (King et al., 1998). The current study has its roots in performance anxiety and deals primarily with a fear of failure.

Failure is known as the state or condition of not meeting a desirable or intended objective, and may be viewed as the opposite of success. As human beings, we all have an innate driven to achieve mastery in all spheres of life. Erick Erickson talked about a series of stages, each aimed at achieving

mastery over specific domains. Mastery or success at each stage may be attained through repeated trial and error. It is only when failure is experienced and the individual overcomes it that success is arrived at.

In today's society where cut - throat competition is largely prevalent, individuals seek to go from one win to another. Loss or failure is something that is looked down upon and individuals begin to fear it even at a young age. A mild form of this fear may serve to be motivating but often it gets blown out of proportion resulting in a fear of failure. Athletes too, it is seen may generate a fear of failure when they worry about not getting what they want and have worked hard to obtain.

On account of the growing nature of sports psychology, there has been an increased interest in the gender differences that may exist with regard to sport and sport related play. This study seeks to explain the gender differences specifically in relation to the type of motivation and levels of fear of failure that influence athletic performance.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### **Motivation and gender differences**

Considerable research has been done in the field of motivation and sport. Research has found that motivation has a direct influence on an individual's performance, persistence and learning (Duda, 1989; Vallerand, Deci, & Ryan, 1987). It thereby, seeks to be a crucial factor in determining the extent to which athletes initiate, maintain and seek to grow in the field of sport.

Further, focusing on the gender differences in types of motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic motivation), several studies have been done on the effect of scholarship and its relation to performance in sport. Ryan (1980) did a study on a sample of male football players and female athletes on scholarship. Results displayed that scholarship or an extrinsic stimulus, served to have a greater influence on the performance of male athletes than female athletes. Male athletes were thus found to have lower levels of intrinsic motivation on account of the impact of scholarship. In another study it was found that female athletes reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation than male athletes irrespective of the presence of scholarship (Fortier, Vallerand, & Guay, 1995).

Reed & Cox, (2003) in a study titled ' The Effects of Athletic Scholarships on Motivation in Sport' took a sample of 70 non-scholarship and 46 scholarship basketball players and assessed present and future levels of motivation. Results indicated that male scholarship athletes displayed higher levels of introjected regulation than female non-scholarship athletes, and higher levels of external regulation as compared to female scholarship athletes and all non-scholarship athletes. The current study was based solely in the country of Canada and the sample was taken from the sport of Basketball. Thereby this difference in the type of motivation among males and females cannot be generalized to other cultures or to sports that are played on an individual basis where team cohesion does not play a contributory role.

Kingston et al., (2006) stated otherwise, and proved thorough a replication of a study conducted by Amorose and Hom, (2000) that regardless of gender, athletes on scholarship displayed higher levels of intrinsic motivation than <https://assignbuster.com/fear-of-failure-among-college-athletes-psychology-essay/>



non - scholarship athletes. This indicates that external stimuli such as scholarship have a similar effect on the motivation of both males and females. Further, Kingston (2006) looked into aspects of extrinsic motivation, and found that collegiate male athletes demonstrated significantly higher levels of extrinsic motivation, specifically external regulation as compared to females.

In a study aimed at measuring if gender and motivation type were related to athletes ' perceptions of team cohesion. Halbrook,. Blom, Hurley, Bell, & Holden collected a sample of 253 male and female collegiate athletes. On administering the Sports Motivation Scale (SMS; Pelletier et al, 1995) and the Group Environment Questionnaire (EQ; Carrón et al., 1985), results revealed significant positive correlations between perceptions of task and social cohesion with each of the three intrinsic motivation types and two extrinsic motivation types (i. e integrated regulation and identified regulation). Negative relationships were found to exist between amotivation and task and social cohesion. This study indicates that the Sports motivation scale is a good predictor of measuring the type of motivation among sports persons.

## **Fear of failure and gender differences**

Fear of failure is also another crucial factor in determining an athlete's involvement in sport. Unlike motivation that serves to be a driving force, fear of failure serves as a mar towards progression. H. A Murray (1938) was the person behind the conceptualization of dispositional achievement motivation as the combination of an individual's need for achievement which serves to be the approach motive and his/her fear of failure which acts as the

avoidance motive. Both the avoidance motive and the achievement motive  
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are characteristic of being stable in nature and are considered to have been socialized early in childhood (Birney et al., 1969; Conroy, 2003; Elliot & Reis, 2003; Elliot & Thrash, 2004; Hermans, ter Laak, & Maes, 1972; McClelland et al., 1953; Teevan & McGhee, 1972). This may in turn serve to be a contributory factor of gender differences that exist later in life.

As stated above, classical achievement motivation theorists talked about the need for individual's to avoid failure and thus they thereby act or behave in ways that prevent the likelihood of experiencing the failure itself (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, and Lowell, 1953). These early achievement motivation theories (Atkinson, 1964; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1958) defined fear of failure as the motive to avoid failure because one feels shame and humiliation upon failure. Thus, fear of failure is prominent under conditions where individuals feel their ability is being judged and where there is a high chance of failure to occur, resulting in the person to seek escape or avoidance of the situation (Atkinson & Feather, 1966; Birney, Burdick, & Teevan, 1969).

Sports related research on fear of failure has associated it with youth drop - out rates and barriers to sport participation (Orlick, 1974). Failure and negative social evaluation are predominant sources of worry among many young athletes. Young elite athletes' worries were related to primarily to the fear of failure, fear of negative evaluation, feelings of inadequacy, and external control or guilt (Gould, Horn, & Spreemann, 1983). Research done on samples of youth wrestlers (Gould et al., 1983; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984) and runners (Feltz & Albrecht, 1986) indicated that the major source of their fears revolved around making mistakes, not performing to their  
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ability, not improving on their performance, not participating in championship events, and losing. Winning and losing are a part and parcel of every sport and from a very young age winning is something that individuals strive towards, losing on the other is something that they learn to dread. A win serves to be a standard of success while a loss becomes a threat and is considered as failure (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1988). Pressure to be the best and achieve high standards of sporting performances, can bring with it increased levels of fear of failure among athletes (Hosek & Man, 1989).

A multidimensional and hierarchical model of fear of failure has been developed that incorporates previous findings on fear of failure. This model has been based on the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion (Lazarus, 1991). This theory talks about fear of failure being a result of the activation of cognitive schemas attached to situations that are fear provoking, on account of possible failure in those situations. Further, this theory states that individuals make evaluations of events and experience an associated anxiety on account of the meaning they attach to those situations. Thereby, an aversive interpretation of the consequences of failure leads individuals to fear failure itself (Birney, Burdick, & Teevan, 1969; Conroy et al., 2001; Conroy et al., 2002).

Conroy, Poczwardowski, and Henschen, (2001) used inductive content analysis to narrow down into five broad categories the aversive consequences of failure that individuals fear (a) experiencing shame and embarrassment, (b) devaluing one's self-estimate, (c) having an uncertain future, (d) important others losing interest, and (e) upsetting important others (Conroy, 2001; Conroy, Metzler, and Hofer, 2003; Conroy, Willow, and <https://assignbuster.com/fear-of-failure-among-college-athletes-psychology-essay/>

Metzler, 2002). In sum, it is seen that fear of failure is linked to maladaptive results in the undertaking of any given activity.

In the year 2009, Sagar; Lavallee and Spray did a study titled 'Coping With the Effects of Fear of Failure: A Preliminary Investigation of Young Elite Athletes'. Interviews were conducted on a one to one basis with nine young elite athletes (5 males, 4 females; ages 14-17 years) and revealed that fear of failure affected the athletes' well-being, interpersonal behavior, sport performance, and schoolwork. This qualitative study indicates that there is a need for further research in the field of fear of failure with older athletes and how it may impact other related areas such as motivation. In addition, a quantitative study may serve to enhance the ability to generalize the results.

Sagar, Boardley, and Kavussanu, (2011) found that male students reported higher levels of fear of significant others losing interest and a threat to their social standing. Females on the other hand were more concerned with a fear of devaluing one's self-estimate, which in turn is said to be related to relatively lower competence levels in females as compared to males. In a study done by Elison, and Jeff, (2012) results revealed that females report fear of shame and embarrassment to a greater degree than males and fear of devaluing one's self estimate to a greater degree than males. Females also report need for approval and rumination to a larger extent than males. Thus, females tend to exhibit modestly greater fear of failure and perfectionism. The above studies indicate that there is a considerable need to make a contemporary research with regard to the prevalence of gender differences in the fear of failure of individuals within the sporting domain.

## **Relationship between motivation, fear of failure and the role of gender**

Motivation it is seen may serve the role of approach or of avoidance.

Contemporary goal theorists talk about the presence of two types of approach motivation, namely, mastery and performance goals.

Mastery approach goals are found to correspond to high levels of intrinsic motivation while performance approach goals are found to correspond to high levels of extrinsic motivation (Elliot & Church, 1997; Smith et al., 2002).

Avoidance goals are said to correspond to the presence of Amotivation in individuals. Past research has repeatedly shown that need for achievement involves the taking up of mastery-approach and performance-approach goals, while fear of failure leads to the implementation of avoidance goals (mastery and performance) as well as performance-approach goals (Conroy, 2004; Conroy & Elliot, 2004; Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & McGregor, 1999; Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Elliot & Sheldon, 1997; Schmalt, 2005; Thrash & Elliot, 2002; Van Yperen, 2006).

Another study done by Conroy and Elliot (2003) on 356 college students, revealed that fear of failure was positively related to mastery-avoidance, performance-approach and performance-avoidance achievement goals.

Though this study has been done in the academic setting, it would be of interest to find individuals displayed similar mannerisms in the context of sport.

Nien & Duda, (2008) did do a study on 450 British male and female athletes. The study was aimed at identify revealing gender differences in the multiple

achievement goal measurement model. Questionnaires assessing approach and avoidance achievement goals, perceived sport competence, fear of failure, and motivation regulations, were administered to the athletes. Only partial invariance was supported with respect to the antecedents' achievement goals-consequences model. Further, gender differences were not revealed amidst the paths between fear of failure to mastery-avoidance goal, mastery-approach goal to intrinsic motivation, and performance-approach goal to extrinsic motivation. In a country like India, where gender differences are so apparent across several domains, it is important that we research into the extent to which gender may play a role in the field of sport. Further, this study revealed that both the Sports Motivation Scale (SMS; Pelletier et al., 1995) and The Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory by David E. Conroy are can be used to measure the type of motivation and levels of fear of failure among athletes.

### Indian Studies

A study done by Rathee and Singh, (2011) measured the levels of achievement motivation, emotional and social adjustment among international and national players of various team sports. For this purpose, 240 Indian players were selected from the sports of basketball, hockey and handball. The achievement motivation test was administered to the athletes and results indicated that international players had higher levels of achievement motivation, and were better adjusted than national players. Further, gender studies indicated that there were little or no differences among the players at that level. The current study focused primarily on achievement motivation and did not consider gender differences with regard <https://assignbuster.com/fear-of-failure-among-college-athletes-psychology-essay/>

to the type of motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic) and the possible effect it may have on levels of fear of failure. Sporting participation of individuals at lower levels of competition such as inter - college competitions has not be studied in the above case and there is need to do so for national and international players come into the category of ' elite' sportsmen and they thereby may have different factors influencing their participation.

## METHODOLOGY

### **Rationale for this study**

Psychology is a rapidly growing field and sport psychology in particular has found to be crucial in the churning out of ace class athletes around the world. In India, where gender differences are apparent across various domains, it is crucial that it be taken into consideration while dealing with persons in the counseling setting. Motivation and fear of failure serve to act as push and a pull factors for individuals indulging in any given activity. It is thereby essential that we investigate into these two variables and whether gender has a role to play in the field of sport. This will serve to add to the limited research done in the field of motivation and fear of failure, especially so with regard to the Indian context.

### **Scope of this study**

The present study will aid in creating awareness in relation to the influence of gender in the type of motivation and the level of fear of failure that Indian athletes at the college level may experience. It will further aid in counselors and coaches to be more sensitive to the needs of athletes with regard to aspects of motivation and fear of failure.

## **Operational definitions**

In the following is an understanding of the operational and constitutive definitions of the various variables under study:

**Gender:** The state of being male or female (typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones). (Oxford dictionary)

**Motivation:** Motivation may be understood as a combination of an internal drive that stems from within us and external factors that seek to influence it. (Deci 1975)

**Intrinsic motivation:** intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity purely for the pleasure and Satisfaction derived from doing the activity (Deci, 1975).

**Extrinsic motivation:** extrinsic motivation pertains to a wide variety of behaviors that are engaged in as a means to an end and not for their own sake (Deci, 1975).

**Amotivation:** experiencing feelings of incompetence and lack of control (Deci & Ryan, 1985)

**Fear of failure:** An association between a specific stimuli and threat triggers fear response and avoidance behaviour

Because such behaviour is believed to prevent the unpleasant outcome that is feared (Barlow, 2002; Field & Lawson, 2003; Gray, 1987).



Indian: a native or inhabitant of India, or a person of Indian descent (Oxford dictionary)

Colligate athletes: a term encompassing college and university level competitive sports personnel.

## **Aim**

To study the effect of gender on the type of motivation and the level of fear of failure among colligate athletes.

## **Objectives**

To measure the effect of gender on the type of motivation among athletes.

To measure the effect of gender on the level of fear of failure of among athletes.

To study the correlation between the type of motivation and the level of fear of failure among athletes.

## **Research design**

The questionnaire method will be employed for the purpose of research.

Here a certain sample of male and female participants will be studied in relation to the variables of motivation and the fear of failure using a single - point questionnaire assessment.

## **Hypothesis**

In the following are the various hypotheses that were formulated:

The motivation subscales of intrinsic motivation to learn and know, to experience stimulation, and toward accomplishments, as well as integrated regulation would have negative relationships with fear of failure.

The motivation subscales of identified regulation, introjected regulation, external regulation, and amotivation would have positive relationships with fear of failure.

There would be an interaction between gender and motivation type as well as gender and fear of failure.

## **Sample**

The sample would consist of students aged 18 – 25. All individuals who are currently on the college team will be contacted from sports played on an individual basis such as tennis, table – tennis, badminton and athletics. The participants will be from universities situated in the city of Bangalore. A minimum sample size of 60, including 30 men and 30 women is to be sought.

Inclusion Criteria-

Aged 18 – 25

Individuals who are currently of the college team.

Individuals who are of Indian nationality or Indian decent.

Exclusion Criteria-

Individuals who do not have at least one parent who is Indian and is of nationality other than Indian.

Individuals who are not of the college team.

### **Tools:**

A Socio-Demographic Data Sheet was formulated for the purpose of obtaining information regarding the participant's gender, age, ethnicity, form of sport, year of joining university, no years of having played sport and level of competition.

To assess the participant's type of motivation – Sport Motivation Scale (SMS – 28) by Pelletier et al., (1995) will be employed. It assess individuals on the type of motivation – 1) Intrinsic motivation – which includes intrinsic motivation to know and understand, intrinsic motivation towards accomplishments and intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation, 2) Extrinsic motivation – which includes integrated regulation, identified regulation, introjected regulation and external regulation and lastly is that of Amotivation. Pelletier et al (1995) sampled 593 university athletes and found adequate internal consistency among seven of the eight subscales, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from . 74 to . 80. All subscales were found to have a high positive correlation between one another, with the correlation weakening only between amotivation and intrinsic motivation, which makes theoretical sense. This reliability was also verified in another study by Kingston et al., (2006) with collegiate student athletes; the mean Cronbach's alpha score for the subscales was at least . 80, except for the identification subscale which was below . 70. In addition, the SMS has shown strong logical

validity and adequate content validity (Li & Harmer, 1996; Pelletier et al., 1995).

To assess the level of fear of failure of the participants - The Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory by David E. Conroy is to be employed. Normative data of 440 males and females may be obtained. Initial research has found the subscales to exhibit acceptable internal consistency and has provided evidence supporting the factorial and external validity of the measure (Conroy et al., 2003).

Previous research has proved that both these scales are appropriate for measuring the type of motivation and fear of failure of athletes playing at the university level.

## **Procedure**

### Pilot phase

As part of the pilot phase, the head of the sports department of colleges in Bangalore will be contacted. Further, on obtaining permission to carry out the research, team captains of the various existing individual sports will be contacted and meetings set up with their entire team for the purpose of administration of the questionnaires.

### Main phase

The sample would be collected from sports played on an individual basis. Post setting up meetings with the team, male and female participants are to be briefed in a group regarding the nature of the research. The participants

are permitted to withdraw from the research if they wished to. Those who volunteer to be a part of the study would be each given an envelope containing - two copies of the consent form, a demographics questionnaire, the sports motivation scale and the fear of failure appraisal inventory. Further, they would be first asked to fill up the consent form and the demographic questionnaire. A copy of the consent form is to be given to the participants for future reference. The instructions for the two scales (SMS and The Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory) were given separately and the respondents were asked to not skip any question or to think too much before giving an answer. On the completion of the questionnaires, the participants were to enclose it in self sealed envelopes and hand it over to the researcher.

### **Analysis of data**

The data will be coded using Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Means and Standard deviations are to be independently calculated for male and female participants on their scores on the SMS and Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory. T-tests will be used to examine gender differences in the variables of motivation and fear of failure. Correlation analysis is to be made use of to analyze the association between the variables studied.

### **Ethical considerations:**

The setting for administration was done in a comfortable arena that had good ventilation and illumination.

A general outline of the study was explained to all the participants contacted for th