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## **Influence Of Depressive Coaching Behaviors On Athletic Performance**

### **Jannat Zahid**

M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Sports Sciences and Physical Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

### **Dr. Muhammad Zafar Iqbal But**

Department of Sports Sciences and Physical Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

### **Dr. Alamgir Khan**

Department of Sports Sciences and Physical Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

### **Saqib Yousaf**

M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Sports Sciences and Physical Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

### **Mehmet Dalkılıç**

Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey Üniversitesi Spor Bilimleri Fakültesi, Karaman, Türkiye

### **Dr. Zeliha Selamoglu**

Department of Medical Biology, Medicine Faculty, Nigde Omer Halisdemir University, Nigde, Türkiye & Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International KazakhTurkish University, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Biology, Turkestan, Kazakhstan.

## **ABSTRACT**

Depressive coaching behaviors, including excessive criticism, emotional withdrawal, lack of encouragement, and harsh communication, may negatively influence athletes' motivation, confidence, and overall performance. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of depressive coaching behaviors on athletic performance. The population of the study comprised female athletes from Punjab University, Pakistan and thus One hundred (100) respondents were selected as the sample by using an available sampling technique. A self-made questionnaire gone through the process of validity and reliability was used for the collection of data from the respondents. The collected data were processed through the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS, version 32), and thus, suitable statistical tools were applied for the collection of data. Based on data analysis, the researcher concluded that depressive coaching is a common problem among female athletes. Likewise, the researcher also concluded that many psychological and physical problems are related to the depressive coaching being faced by the female athletes.

**Keywords:** Depressive Coaching, Athlete performance, Psychological Performance, Female Athletes.



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### INTRODUCTION

Coaching plays a crucial role in shaping athletes' development, performance, and psychological well-being. Beyond teaching technical skills, coaches influence athletes' confidence, motivation, emotional regulation, and resilience. Research indicates that supportive coaching behaviors enhance performance, while negative behaviors may harm both physical and psychological functioning. Depressive coaching behavior refers to coaching practices characterized by emotional neglect, excessive criticism, lack of encouragement, harsh communication, and limited empathy (Gearity, 2017, Khan et al, 2014).

Coaching is a central determinant of athlete development, influencing not only technical skills but also psychological growth, motivation, and long-term engagement in sport. Coaches shape the emotional climate in which athletes train and compete, thereby affecting confidence, resilience, and stress management. Research consistently demonstrates that supportive coaching behaviors enhance athlete satisfaction and performance, whereas negative coaching behaviors can undermine both well-being and achievement (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Zhang et al., 2023).

Gender differences in response to coaching behavior have been documented in sport psychology literature. Female athletes tend to place greater emphasis on relational support and communication quality. As a result, emotionally unsupportive coaching may have a stronger psychological and performance-related impact on women compared to men (Vella & Oades, 2013).

Depressive coaching behavior refers to patterns of interaction characterized by excessive criticism, emotional withdrawal, lack of encouragement, neglect of athletes' psychological needs, and harsh communication styles. Such behaviors create emotionally unsafe environments that may reduce self-esteem, increase anxiety, and weaken motivation. Athletes exposed to emotionally harmful coaching often report burnout symptoms, psychological distress, and reduced sport commitment (Kerr & Stirling, 2012). Such behaviors create a stressful and unsafe environment for athletes, potentially leading to anxiety, burnout, and reduced motivation. Studies have shown that athletes exposed to emotionally abusive or highly critical coaching report lower self-esteem and poorer mental health outcomes (Kerr & Stirling, 2012, Zia et al, 2019, Khan, 2022).

According to Deci and Ryan (2000), Self-Determination Theory explains that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential psychological needs. When coaches fail to provide emotional support and autonomy, athletes' intrinsic motivation declines. This reduced motivation can negatively affect training consistency, competitive focus, and physical endurance. Previous research also suggests that female athletes may be more emotionally responsive to coaching behaviors than males (Vella et al., 2013).

### STATEMENT OF STUDY

Coaching is a collective, goal-oriented partnership designed to unlock a person's potential and maximize their performance, personally or professionally. Therefore, examining depressive coaching within female university athletes is particularly important. Although positive coaching behaviors have been widely studied, limited research has specifically examined the direct impact of depressive coaching behaviors on both physical and psychological performance simultaneously. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the relationship between depressive coaching behavior and athlete performance among female university athletes.



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### METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between depressive coaching behaviors and the physical and psychological performance of female university athletes. The population of the study comprised female athletes from Punjab University, Pakistan and thus One hundred (100) respondents were selected as the sample by using an available sampling technique. Data were collected through a self-developed closed-ended questionnaire constructed on the basis of existing literature related to coaching behavior and athlete performance. The instrument measured depressive coaching behaviors, including critical feedback, emotional withdrawal, and lack of verbal encouragement, as well as indicators of physical performance (strength, stamina, and consistency) and psychological performance (confidence, focus, resilience, and stress management).

Content validity of the questionnaire was established through expert review in the field of sports sciences, while reliability was assessed through pilot testing with 20 female athletes prior to the main data collection. The questionnaire was personally distributed by the researcher and collected after completion to ensure a high response rate and accuracy. The collected data were coded and analyzed using SPSS (Version 32). Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were computed to summarize responses, while Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships between variables. Multiple regression analysis was applied to determine the predictive effect of depressive coaching behaviors on athlete performance, and ANOVA was used to assess differences based on years of athletic experience.

### PRESENTATION OF DATA

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Survey Responses on Depressive Coaching Behavior**

Question Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Q1: Encouraging Statements	3.8	0.9	10	7	14	28	41
Q2: Rare Verbal Encouragement	2.8	1.2	25	17	25	16	17
Q3: Supportive Comments	3.5	0.8	22	19	24	16	19

This table indicates the general trend in coaching behavior responses. Most participants agreed with the encouraging behavior (Q1), but there is a noticeable trend toward neutral or negative responses for questions related to verbal encouragement (Q2) and supportive comments (Q3). This suggests that depressive behaviors, such as a lack of verbal encouragement, may be more prevalent than positive reinforcement.



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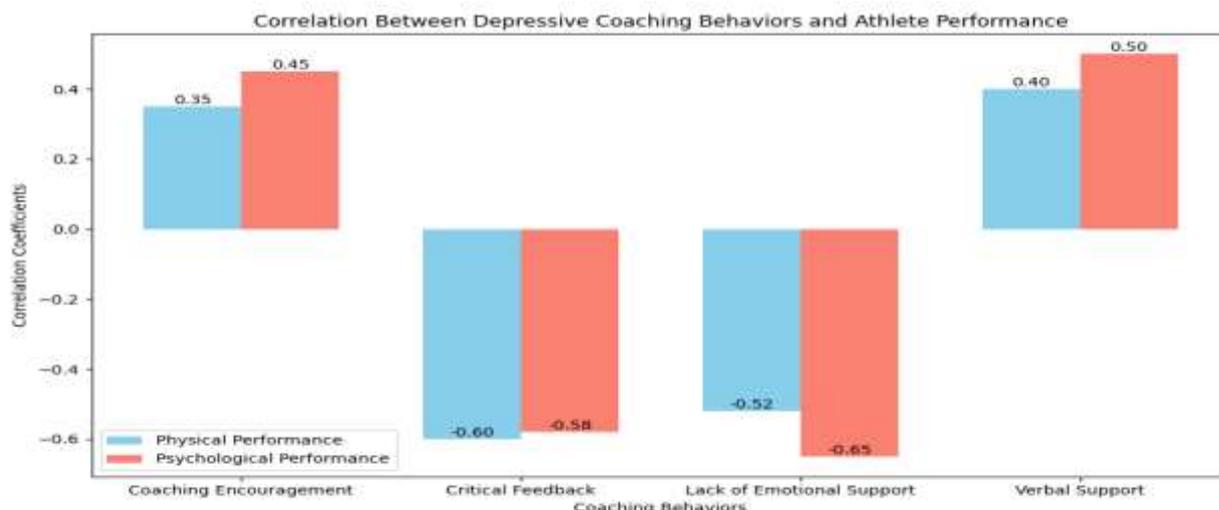
**Table 2: Correlation between Depressive Coaching Behaviors and Athlete Performance**

Testing Variables	Physical Performance	Psychological Performance
Coaching Encouragement	0.35*	0.45*
Critical Feedback	-0.60*	-0.58*
Lack of Emotional Support	-0.52*	-0.65*
Verbal Support	0.40*	0.50*

Note: All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level.

The table reveals a strong negative correlation between depressive coaching behaviors (critical feedback and lack of emotional support) and both physical and psychological performance. This indicates that when coaches engage in more critical behaviors or fail to offer emotional support, the athletes' performance—both physical and psychological—suffers significantly.

**Figure 1: Correlation between Depressive Coaching Behaviors and Athlete Performance**



This figure illustrates the correlation coefficients between various depressive coaching behaviors and both physical and psychological performance in athletes. Positive behaviors, such as coaching encouragement and verbal support, show a moderate positive correlation with athlete performance. In contrast, negative behaviors, including critical feedback and lack of emotional support, show a strong negative correlation with performance outcomes. These correlations are significant at the 0.01 level, indicating that coaching behaviors play a crucial role in determining athlete performance, both physically and psychologically.

**Table 3: Regression Analysis of Depressive Coaching Behaviors on Athlete Performance**

Variable	Beta (Physical Performance)	Beta (Psychological Performance)
Critical Feedback	-0.45**	-0.55**



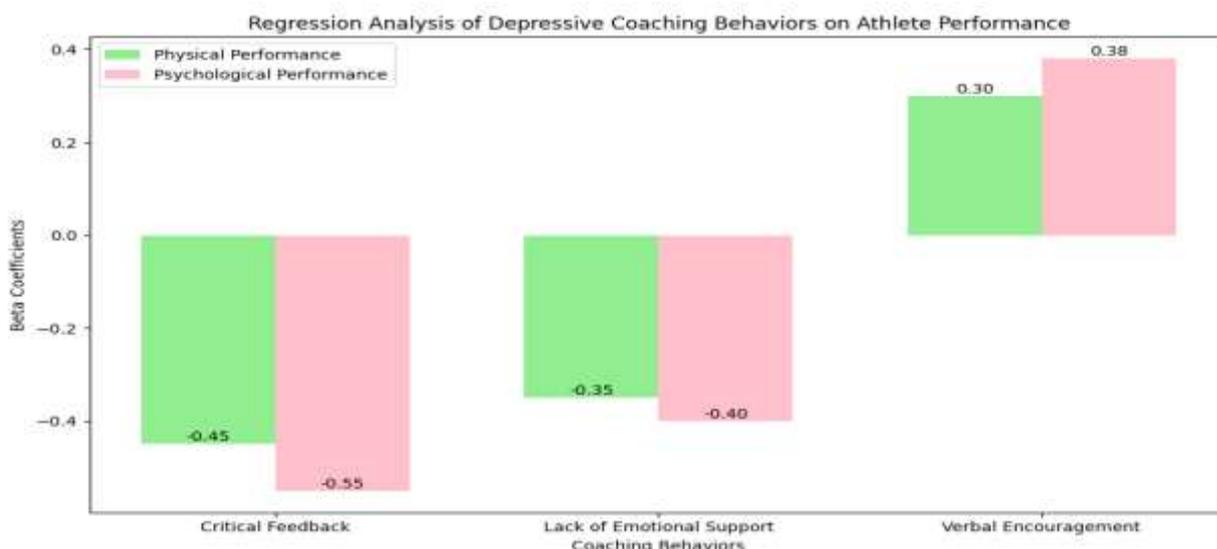
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Variable	Beta (Physical Performance)	Beta (Psychological Performance)
Lack of Emotional Support	-0.35**	-0.40**
Verbal Encouragement	0.30*	0.38*

\*Note: \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01

The regression analysis confirms that both critical feedback and a lack of emotional support are significant predictors of lower athlete performance, both physically and psychologically. The negative impact of depressive coaching behaviors is evident, where the absence of encouragement and positive feedback diminishes performance outcomes.

**Figure 2: Regression Analysis of Depressive Coaching Behaviors on Athlete Performance**



This figure presents the beta coefficients from the regression analysis of depressive coaching behaviors on both physical and psychological performance. It shows that critical feedback and lack of emotional support are significant predictors of lower physical and psychological performance, with negative beta coefficients indicating a detrimental impact. Verbal encouragement, on the other hand, is positively associated with both physical and psychological performance, and though its effect is weaker compared to the negative behaviors.

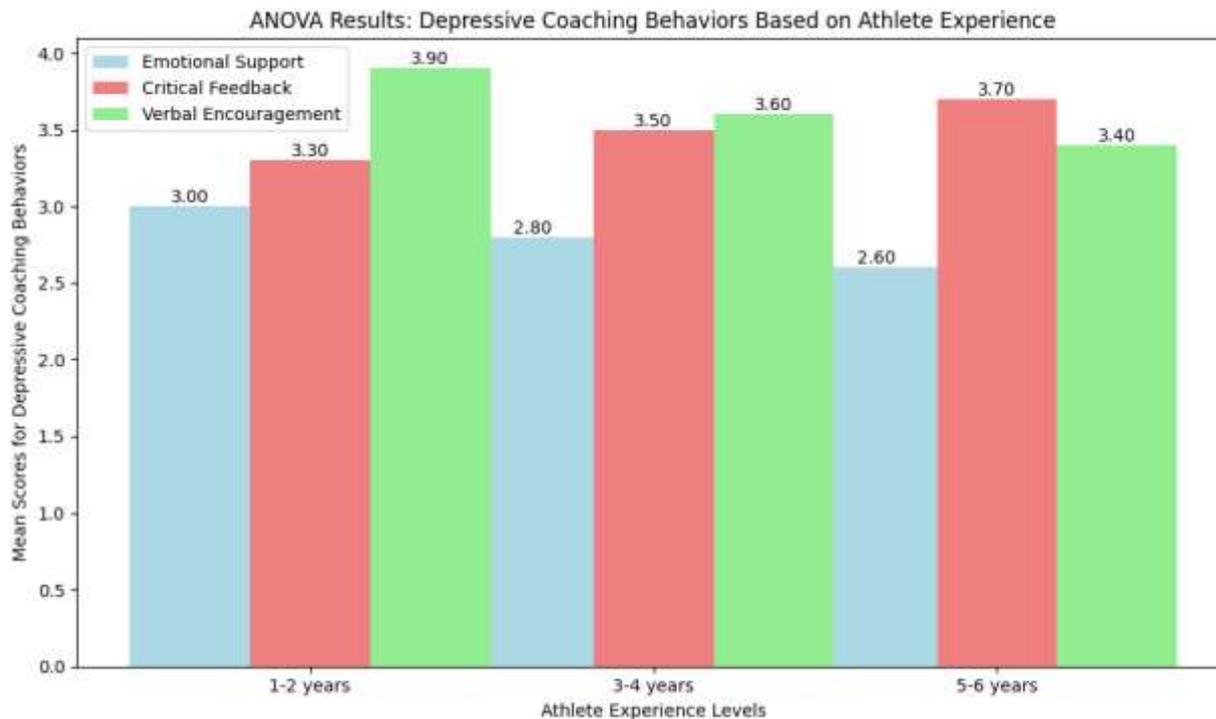
**Table 4: ANOVA for Depressive Coaching Behaviors Based on Athlete Experience**

Variable	1-2 years	3-4 years	5-6 years	F-value	p-value
Emotional Support	3.0	2.8	2.6	4.02	0.01
Critical Feedback	3.3	3.5	3.7	2.89	0.03
Verbal Encouragement	3.9	3.6	3.4	1.76	0.08

Note: Significant values are marked.



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**Figure 3: ANOVA Results: Depressive Coaching Behaviors Based on Athlete Experience**

This figure summarizes the results of an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) that investigates the differences in depressive coaching behaviors across three athlete experience levels (1-2 years, 3-4 years, and 5-6 years). The figure highlights significant differences in emotional support and critical feedback, with athletes in the 1-2 years' experience group reporting the lowest levels of emotional support and the highest levels of critical feedback. Verbal encouragement did not show significant differences across experience levels, suggesting that its impact is consistent regardless of experience.

The regression analysis further highlights that when coaches fail to offer verbal encouragement or emotional support, athletes are more likely to experience reduced performance outcomes. This is particularly significant in female athletes who tend to be more affected by coaching behaviors compared to their male counterparts.

## DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that depressive coaching behaviors negatively influence both physical and psychological performance among female athletes. Such an emerging concept is supported by Cho et al. (2019), who reported that negative coaching behaviours increase anxiety and burnout, leading to performance decline. In line with these findings, the study carried out by Khan et al (2022) and Zia et al (2019) stated that harsh or emotionally abusive coaching contributes to increased anxiety, burnout, and reduced self-confidence. When feedback is perceived as destructive rather than constructive, athletes' perceived competence declines, leading to diminished effort and impaired performance during competition. Cho et al (2022) found that depressive coaching behaviours, particularly critical feedback and lack of emotional support, significantly hinder both physical and psychological performance in athletes.

Athletes with fewer years of experience appeared more vulnerable, possibly due to lower coping capacity. The results further indicated that less experienced athletes were more sensitive to depressive coaching behaviors. Athletes with fewer years of participation



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may lack coping strategies to manage criticism and emotional neglect effectively. This finding is consistent with prior literature suggesting that younger or less experienced athletes are more vulnerable to emotionally harmful coaching environments (Stirling & Kerr, 2013).

Interestingly, psychological performance appeared to be more strongly affected than physical performance. This suggests that emotional and cognitive mechanisms may mediate the relationship between coaching behaviour and physical outcomes. Anxiety, reduced confidence, and impaired concentration can limit reaction time, decision-making accuracy, and endurance, thereby indirectly influencing physical execution during competition (Zhang et al., 2023).

### CONCLUSION

On the basis of data analysis and findings, the researcher concluded that depressive coaching behaviors, particularly critical feedback and lack of emotional support, significantly harm both physical and psychological performance in female university athletes. Coaches must adopt supportive, emotionally intelligent, and constructive communication styles to enhance athlete well-being and performance.

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