

# Aggression and Sportsmanship among University Intramural Games Athletes

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## ABSTRACT

Sports impart teamwork, perseverance, and healthy competition through athletic participation. However, unsportsmanlike conduct among athletes, coaches, and spectators undermines the values of sports. This study aimed to determine the significant relationship between the levels of aggression and sportsmanship. This study used a descriptive-correlation type of research method. The data were collected among Football and Basketball athletes of the Mindanao State University–Main Campus University Intramural Games using a standardized questionnaire on levels of aggression and sportsmanship. The data was treated utilizing Pearson Product Moment Correlation or Pearson  $r$  to measure the significant relationship among the variables. Findings showed that most respondents were aged 21-23. Also, the majority of the aggression level was low and fair, while most of the respondents' level of sportsmanship was average. Further, the study showed that the levels of aggression revealed no significant relationship to sportsmanship. This implies that the level of aggression is not a factor to consider when determining the sportsmanship behavior of an individual, particularly among athletes in the university intramural games.

**Keywords:** level of aggression, sportsmanship, descriptive-correlation, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

Sports serves as a microcosm of society, immediately portraying a dualistic character that highlights both the desirable traits of sportsmanship and the undesirable elements of aggressiveness. Bergholz et al. (2016) assert that two contradictory elements coexist within the domain of athletic competition, influencing not only the outcome of games but also the character development of athletes. Moreover, fair play and integrity in sports uphold moral and ethical norms in sports. According to Pennington (2017) and Smith and Stewart (2017), the concept of fair play encompasses honesty, respect, and sportsmanship. In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on fair play in youth sports, with statistics showing a 15% increase in youth sports programs incorporating character education and sportsmanship principles over the past five years. It includes humility and compassion, acceptance of referees' decisions, respect for opponents, and rule-following. In contrast, sports aggression is driven by a desire to win at all costs and hurt an opponent. Therefore, understanding the factors that promote sportsmanship and reduce aggression is essential for creating a positive sports environment for all.

Moreover, sportsmanship serves as a moral compass, directing athletes to make judicious choices and behave with integrity, even in challenging circumstances. Fostering sportsmanship necessitates a comprehensive strategy, integrating education, mentorship, and exemplary behavior to imbue these principles in athletes from an early age (Pennington, 2017). However, aggression in sports encompasses a spectrum of behaviors, ranging from assertive and goal-oriented actions necessary for competitive success to hostile acts intended to inflict harm, potentially undermining the spirit of fair play and ethical conduct (Shachar et al., 2016). Understanding the underlying causes and implications of aggression in sports necessitates a comprehensive examination of various contributing factors, including neurobiological influences, psychological predispositions, and sociocultural contexts (Rosell & Siever, 2015).

Moreover, approximately 50 percent of parents and coaches believe sportsmanship has worsened in youth sports. It was reported that 60 percent of athletes witness or participate in harmful or abusive sideline behavior. Likewise, melees, poor sportsmanship, and over-commercialization of games are the inevitable results of a system prioritizing individual gain over the collective good (O'Donnell, 2014; Cordak, 2024). There were also reports on fights, disrespecting the referee, intentional acts of injury to opposing players exhibit unsportsmanlike attitudes, discrimination, racism, and other fair play alterations in various competitions (Austin, 2013; Crossan et al., 2023). The persistence of aggressive behavior in societies with laws and norms that restrict violence presents a paradox in contemporary contexts, potentially influenced by the association between aggression and positive affect. This paradox illustrates the conflicting relationship between the immediate benefits of hostility and its enduring repercussions (Chester, 2017).

Additionally, Sofia and Cruz (2017) also stated that athletes exhibiting higher aggression are typically associated with sports characterized by greater physical contact and lower or younger competitive tiers, whereas those with lower aggression tend to participate in sports with reduced contact and higher competitive levels. Further, Marwat et al. (2022) confirmed that aggression and violence were embedded in the essential character and aggression was part of human psychology. Furthermore, aggression and violence in sports are two distinct forms of antagonistic behavior that are both associated with the personal vested interest of the individual by inflicting harm on the opponent.

The existing body of research primarily consists of quantitative and qualitative studies that examine aggression and sportsmanship. However, a dearth of studies still specifically examine the relationship between aggression and sportsmanship. Also, most studies on aggression and sportsmanship were in a foreign context. Specifically, the study of Julaimi & Kamal (2024) & Yanik's (2019) was conducted in a foreign background and used rugby players and physical education students as respondents. In this context, a study in the Philippines, specifically in Mindanao, should be conducted to fill the knowledge gap in the country's research environment. The researchers can enhance the understanding of the relationship between aggression and sportsmanship. Lastly, the researchers felt the need to look into this area to explore and describe the opportunities, reasons, and factors that contribute to the enhancement of sportsmanship and identify how it can generally control aggression and sportsmanship.

## **Research Questions**

This study aims to determine the relationship between aggression and sportsmanship of university intramural games athletes. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the profile of the respondents in terms of the following:
  - level of aggression; and
  - level of sportsmanship?
2. Is there a significant relationship between the level of aggression and sportsmanship?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This quantitative research employed a descriptive-correlational design. Creswell (2018) contends that a quantitative research methodology emphasizes objective measurements and the statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data collected through polls, questionnaires, and surveys or by altering pre-existing statistical data using computational tools. It emphasizes collecting quantitative data and its generalization across populations or elucidating a specific occurrence. Further, a descriptive approach describes the variables and the relationships that occur naturally between and among them. Aggarwal and Ranganathan (2019) also asserted that descriptive research collects data regarding facts or situations for description and interpretation.

This research entailed thorough analyses, interpretation, comparisons, and identifying patterns and linkages. Given these definitions and framework, a combination of descriptive correlational research design is most suitable as the researcher investigated the relationship between levels of aggression towards sportsmanship of the athletes in the university intramural games.

### Population

This study utilized purposive and total enumeration sampling techniques. The respondents for this study were tertiary students aged 18 to 30 years old of Mindanao State University-Main Campus in Marawi City, Philippines, and 100 respondents from university intramural games athletes from basketball and football.

### Research Instruments

In gathering the data, the primary research instrument used was a two-part questionnaire. The first part consisted of the Sports Aggression Questionnaire that Makarowski (2013) developed. The purpose of this research tool is to measure the aggression of athletes during a competition. Moreover, the tool is composed of 15 items. The respondents gave their answers on a five-point Likert-type scale where "a" denotes Definitely not (1 point), "b" denotes Probably not (2 points), "c" - Hard to say (3 points), "d" - Rather yes (4 points), and "e" denotes Definitely yes (5 points). The reliability was assessed using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  internal consistency coefficient, which ranged from 0.69 to 0.83 for the individual subscales. The test's internal structure was verified via confirmatory factor analysis.

Meanwhile, the second part also comprised a standard questionnaire, the Sportsmanship Attitude Scale for Team Sports Questionnaire, developed by Attiya and Omran (2019). The tool contains 50 statements to evaluate the athletes' attitudes toward sportsmanship. The purpose of this instrument is to measure the sportsmanship attitude scale for team sports; in addition, the tool is composed of 50 item constructs that the participants will answer using the 4-point Likert scale, which is as follows: 1 – not applied at all, 2 - Averagely Applied, 3 - Highly Applied, and 4 - Extremely Applied, and vice versa for negative statements. The tool is reported to have higher validity and reliability when measuring sportsmanship behavior. The scale shows acceptable reliability and was measured using Cronbach alphas, which obtained values of 0.70. Moreover, the researchers also conducted a pilot test of the Sports Aggression Questionnaire and the Sports Aggression Questionnaire. It was estimated that the Cronbach coefficient values for the Sports Aggression Questionnaire and Sportsmanship Attitude Scale for Team Sports Questionnaire were 0.80 and 0.83. The Sports Aggression and Sportsmanship Attitude Scale for Team Sports Questionnaire was adapted because this will measure the needed data to measure the aggression and sportsmanship of the respondents.

### Data Collection Procedure

This study relied on the respondent's responses to the questionnaire. To ensure better results, accuracy, and speedy data gathering, the researchers personally distributed the questionnaire to the respondents. A letter request was distributed to the Mindanao State University-Main Campus University Intramural Games coaches of selected sports to ask for permission to allow the researchers to distribute the questionnaires to their respective athletes to gather information on their levels of aggression and sportsmanship. Upon approval, the respondents were given a letter request, the informed consent form, the aggression scale questionnaire, and the sportsmanship attitude scale for team sports questionnaire. The respondents answered the questionnaires during their break and were given approximately 30 minutes to answer the questionnaire before retrieving it. After completing the data, the researcher thanked the athletes and coaches for their cooperation. All data collected were tabulated for analysis and interpretation using computer software.

### Statistical Treatment

Descriptive statistics such as percent and frequency distribution were used to determine the respondents' profiles in terms of level of aggression and level of sportsmanship. Pearson Product Correlation of Coefficient

or Pearson  $r$  was utilized to measure the significant relationship between aggression and sportsmanship. According to Pallant (2001), correlation analysis describes the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables. Pearson Correlation Coefficients ( $r$ ) can only take on values from -1 to +1.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Level of Aggression

Table 1 showed that most respondents scored between 52-68, described as "Fair" with a frequency of 45 or 45%, closely followed by low levels of aggression with a frequency of 44 or 44%. There are also 7 % of the respondents whose level of aggression is high. Only three respondents, or 3%, obtained a very low level of aggression. Lastly, only one respondent, or 1 %, obtained a very high level of aggression. This implies that most athletes in university intramural games have a low to fair level of aggression.

The study results also agrees with the study of Basiaga-Pasternak et al. (2020) that competitive players are generally less aggressive than amateurs. However, in the study of Sofia and Cruz (2017) stated that athletes from lower competitive classifications were more aggressive in sports than those from higher competitive levels. Moreover, Berrebi (2018) and Zafra et al., (2018) also stated that athletes from the lower division of competition have a lesser aggression compared to the higher division. The level of competition can significantly effect an athlete's aggression. As the risks and rewards are higher, so does the pressure to perform, manifesting as increased arousal, heightened emotionality, a narrowing focus, recognize threats to their self-esteem leading to defensive or vengeful aggression.

Further, Trinidad & Raizada (2020) also pointed out that aggression exists in both professional and recreational contexts of play and is, in fact, learned rather than inherently possessed. The results of their study illustrate a pattern of angry outbursts in the sporting arena. Nonetheless, such eruptions or manifestations of accumulated animosity are confined to the playing field and do not extend beyond it. Furthermore Rutten et al. (2008) identify the diverse elements influencing aggression levels among adolescent gamers. This may pertain to the team atmosphere, the ideals and attitudes of the team, the rapport between players and the coach, the team's commitment to fair play, and the sociomoral climate around the entire team.

Moreover, aggression in sports can be instigated by various factors, including media portrayal, referees' efficacy, stadium facilities, law enforcement and security measures, both external and internal stadium environments, coaching conduct, social regulation, familial influence, educational background, socio-economic conditions, substance misuse, player conduct, peer influence, managerial considerations, and cultural and political contexts (Madavani et al., 2023).

Table 1. The demographic profile of the respondents in terms of levels of aggression

Level of Aggression	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	1	1.0
High	7	7.0
Fair	45	45.0
Low	44	44.0
Very Low	3	3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Level of Sportsmanship

Table 2 revealed that the majority of the respondents (78 out of 100), or 78 % of the respondents, applied an average level of sportsmanship between 100-149, followed by 19% of the respondents whose level of sportsmanship is relatively low, and lastly, 3 % of the respondents with a high level of sportsmanship. This

implies that the level of sportsmanship among the university intramurals games athletes is average. Intramural Games have been regarded by many as significant sports competitions where the stakes are high. However, given that, athletes still have an average level of sportsmanship. Moreover, the degree of competition faced by tertiary athletes significantly influences their manifestation of sportsmanship, with higher levels of competition potentially leading to positive and negative impacts on ethical conduct and fair play (Burgueño & Medina-Casabón, 2020; Schaefer et al., 2019). It is also important to recognize that sportsmanship is not a monolithic entity; it encompasses various dimensions, including respect for rules, opponents, officials, and the game itself (Burgueño & Medina-Casabón, 2020). In environments characterized by intense rivalry and pressure to win, athletes might experience heightened stress and anxiety, potentially leading to compromised moral reasoning and an increased likelihood of engaging in unsportsmanlike behaviors (Wachsmuth et al., 2016). These behaviors may manifest as aggressive tactics, rule violations, or disrespectful conduct toward opponents or officials. The family environment plays a central role in shaping children's and adolescents' development of morality (Yaffe et al., 2021).

On the other hand, participation in competitive sports can also foster positive character development and enhance sportsmanship by promoting discipline, teamwork, and resilience. The level of competition can catalyze athletes to develop a deeper understanding of the importance of fair play, ethical conduct, and respect for opponents, thereby contributing to the cultivation of strong moral values. Moreover, organized sports activities offer a platform for athletes to communicate, build relationships, collaborate, and cultivate a sense of belonging (Singh et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the type of sport, whether team-based or individual, can also moderate the relationship between competition level and sportsmanship. Athletes in team sports may exhibit moral reasoning at lower levels than athletes from individual sports. In team sports, the collective moral responsibility and the reduction of the role of the individual athlete within the team should also be considered (Yaffe et al., 2021). Navigating the complexities within college athletics requires aligning athletic program goals with the broader mission of higher education, which may foster ethical conduct (Caulfield et al., 2022). However, it is important to acknowledge that an individual's engagement in competitive sports is not without its challenges and stressors (Singh et al., 2024). The relationships among the various sportsmanship orientations are not orthogonal (Burgueño & Medina-Casabón, 2020).

Table 2. The demographic profile of the respondents in terms of levels of sportsmanship

Level of Sportsmanship	Frequency	Percentage
High	3	3.0
Average	78	78.0
Low	19	19.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Correlation Between the Aggression and Sportsmanship

Table 3 reveals that the level of aggression revealed no significant relationship [ $p = .098 > 0.05$ ] to sportsmanship. This result means that the relationship does not reach the qualifying standard level of significance ( $\alpha 0.05$ ) to become scientifically reliable or credible. The findings imply that the level of aggression is not a factor to consider when determining the sportsmanship behavior of an individual, particularly among athletes in the university intramural games.

Sportsmanship, a multifaceted construct encompassing ethical behavior, fair play, and respect for opponents, rules, and officials, is often erroneously linked to aggression levels in athletes (Burgueño & Medina-Casabón, 2020). Aggression, typically behavior intended to cause harm, is a separate construct that should not be conflated with sportsmanship. Recognizing that an athlete's propensity for aggression, whether instrumental or reactive, does not inherently dictate their sportsmanship conduct (Shachar et al., 2016) is imperative. The



speculation that increased aggression levels consistently result in poor sportsmanship is an generalization that neglects the cognitive, emotional, and social factors that influence behavior in sports settings. Though aggression may look as if as disrespectful behavior, it is vital to recognize that even courteous athletes may show aggression in certain situations. Contrariwise, combative athletes may demonstrate outstanding sportsmanship (Spaaij & Schailée, 2019).

The relationship between sportsmanship and aggression is compound and influenced by many factors, such as an athlete's principles, discipline, and understanding of the ethical values and standards of the sport. Moral reasoning — the cognitive process used to determine the rightness or wrongness of an action — is essential to understanding an athlete's behavior in competitive circumstances. Athletes with strong moral reasoning skills tend to care more about fairness and respect for opponents, regardless of their aggression levels (Yaffe et al., 2021). Self-control, the ability to manage feelings and impulses, is another important variable that moderates the link between aggression and sportsmanship. Athletes with a higher level of self-control can better regulate their aggressive impulses as well as self-direct them into acceptable behaviors that fit with the ideals of sportsmanship (Shachar et al., 2016). In addition, to promote sportsmanship, it is crucial to know and understand the ethical principles and rules of the sport (Burgueño & Medina-Casaubón, 2020). Even faced with fierce competition or provocation, athletes who understand these principles are much more likely to follow them. Additionally, the expression of aggression and sportsmanship can greatly be impacted by contextual variables such as the sports culture, coaching impacts, as well as the impact of role models. Even in athletes with an elevated level of aggression, a sports culture that values ethics, respect, and fair play can engender sportsmanship. Conversely, the application of sportsmanship can be influenced by a sports culture of violence, regardless of the nature of an individual (Spaaij & Schailée, 2018).

The research by Ibáñez et al. (2019) indicated that attitudes of fair play and sportsmanship were more prevalent than unsportsmanlike behaviors and aggression acts. The dominant inappropriate actions identified were verbal aggressions, aligning with findings from prior studies at this level of competition. The infrequent occurrence of unsportsmanlike conduct cannot obscure the significant detrimental effects these behaviors may have on the development of young players, ultimately influencing the overall quality of the youth football experience. The data indicated that while the average assessment of the matches on sportsmanship attained a "notable" level, the evaluation was greater when the host team was victorious. Conversely, the postgame assessments of fair play were less favorable when the visiting side emerged victorious. The match outcome may affect the assessors during their assessment process. This conclusion can be attributed to the anticipation that the home team is superior to the visiting club and is therefore anticipated to win the match.

Table 3. Relationship between aggression and sportsmanship

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	DEPENDENT VARIABLE	
	Levels of Sportsmanship	
	r-value	p-value
Levels of Aggression	.167	.098

## CONCLUSION

The study showed that most university intramural game athletes have a low to fair level of aggression, and their level of sportsmanship is average. Also, the study revealed that the level of aggression revealed no significant relationship to sportsmanship. This implies that the level of aggression is not a factor to consider when determining the sportsmanship behavior of an individual, particularly among athletes in the university intramural games. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that the level of sportsmanship be promoted and the aggression of athletes be lowered through seminars on sports psychology before the schedule of the competition. Further, future researchers may investigate other variables that affect the aggression and sportsmanship of athletes. It is also recommended that other research methods be used, such as another set of

age groups, higher level of competition, and other sports events, and future researchers may conduct a similar study in Visayas and Luzon or other countries.

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