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Perception and Implementation of Sports Safety Measures Among University Physical Education Instructors in Punjab: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

Introduction: *Considerable attention must be focused on sports safety as it is a constituent of the physical education (PE) curriculum at the university level, in view of the frequent and vigorous engagement in physical activities. While there is general acknowledgement of the existence of safety measures, the extent to which such measures are put into practice may differ. This research examines the perceptions and practices related to sports safety of university PE teachers in Punjab, India, for identifying gaps between knowledge and practice, and investigating reasons for effective implementation failures.* ***Methodology:*** *A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was used, consisting of 93 public and private university PE instructors from different regions of Punjab. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which was divided into four parts: demographics, perception of safety measures, implementation practices, and barriers. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25, employing descriptive statistics and Pearson analysis.* ***Results:*** *This study determined that the majority of respondents accepted the importance of sports safety (M=4.4, SD=0.5), and 79% accepted that the existence of safety protocols reduces the possibility of sustaining injuries. However, only 56% of them indicated enough support from their institutions. Though 85% of the instructors conducted equipment checks, fewer performed regular risk assessments (56%) and the enforcement of protective gear use (45%). Inefficient funding (61%) and lack of training (48%), as well as inadequate assistance from the institution (42%), were the primary barriers.* ***Discussion:*** *The research identifies a discrepancy between a high level of awareness concerning sports safety and the inconsistent observance of safety measures. In this case, the gap is due to systemic problems such as insufficient funding and lack of enforcement policies. The results are consistent with earlier studies, which suggest that logistical and institutional difficulties hinder effective safety management in educational facilities.* ***Conclusion:*** *Logically, physical education teachers in Punjab understand the value of sports safety; however, they are unable to execute proper protocols because of systemic barriers. There is an acute need for concrete institutional actions regarding the development of safety policies, adequate resources, and specialised instructors, which would reduce the gap between the perception and actual conditions on the ground.*

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INTRODUCTION

Sports safety is a crucial, albeit overlooked, area of concern within Physical Education (PE) curricula offered at colleges and universities globally. In recent decades, educational institutions have started focusing more on effective risk management in sports because injury, while participating in

structured physical activity, poses a potential threat. This risk is primarily shouldered by PE teachers because they not only wear the educator's hat but also take on the role of a guardian to students' mental and physical health as well. The teacher's responsibility encompasses far more than instructing students on the appropriate strategies and regulations; it incorporates the assurance that all practices are conducted in a safe and healthy environment [1].

Sustained injuries during sports at the university level continue to remain a problem of concern, irrespective of the overriding attention given to preventive measures and safety measures in Illinois [2]. This fact underscores the need to emphasise how safety is understood and enacted by the people in charge of the sports services management, especially in areas where the infrastructure and resources available differ greatly [3].

With regards to India, Punjab is unique for its emphasis on sporting activities at the university level, reinforced by its rich physical culture [4]. Sports activities help enhance the physical abilities of pupils along with the development of social skills, emotional strength and overall academic experience.

Regardless, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding the attitude of PE instructors in Punjab towards sports safety among other neglected areas of concern. While universities are on the increase and there is a growing popularity of sports programmes, many institutions face challenges such as a lack of adequate facilities, underfunding, and the absence of formal safety training for instructors.

This is the gap this research intends to fill by investigating the views and actions related to sports safety of PE instructors in universities in Punjab. This study concentrates on three principal areas: the instructors' knowledge of the sports safety measures, the degree of actual adherence to these measures, and the factors that hinder these measures from being consistently implemented. This study aims to inform policies and professional practice frameworks by addressing these gaps in order to fortify the safety of sports programmes in universities [5, 6].

Sports Safety in Physical Education

Sports safety encompasses a diverse set of practices ranging from the planning stage, which incorporates injury preventive strategies, warm-up, and cool-down exercises, to the protective equipment and emergency procedures set [7]. These measures are essential to aid in the reduction of injuries and the risk of students withdrawing from physical activities. This is, however, often hindered by persistent challenges that tend to be unchanging.

An example could be a lack of funds for safety equipment or targeted training for physiotherapy instructors in sports safety may result in in-training PE instructors having out-of-date or limited facilities.

Global assessments have often showcased the gap between instructors' knowledge of safety practices and practical application mastery. Simons et al. [8], for instance, found that while instructors are generally cognisant of the principles of injury prevention, prevailing system constraints such as inadequate facilities, administrative neglect, and inadequate institutional training often render the application of recommended practices impossible. It is not only in India where this gap exists, but it is likely more severe here than in some of its universities, particularly in less affluent areas like Punjab.

The rapid increase in the scope of offered courses in the region's universities for physical education tends to outpace the evolving safety policies, leading to lower care standards in disproportionate measures. Oftentimes, physiotherapy instructors are assumed to professionally control and maintain safety and civility without proper initial training or resource provision. Such factors bring to light the need to document the beliefs and real experiences of educators who are directly involved in instructing care for students participating in sports [9].

The Importance of Physical Education Teachers

Physical education teachers are important active participants in fostering safe environments for sporting activities.

The scope of their duties encompasses not only the delivery of substantive teaching but also the planning and oversight of other activities, carrying out risk evaluations, monitoring equipment use, and providing any first aid necessary when injuries arise. Furthermore, like all educators, the PE instructor must meet the varying demands of all learners, including differences in age, level of health, and knowledge of sporting rules and regulations. This calls for a more adaptable approach to inclusive safety, highly effective instruction, sophisticated communication regarding self-protection, and injury prevention education.

Most recently, these instructors, especially those teaching in public universities with thin budgets, claim that they have no professional training in the provision of safety resources designed for the classroom context. This gap of provision contributes to poor uniformity of standardised safety measures between institutions and highlights the need for appropriate strategies that give educators the means to fulfil their responsibilities.

The Scope of Punjab

Punjab remains notable in India for its sports-associated glory with a definitive historical significance in field hockey, cricket, and athletics. Concerned universities of the state have been progressively adding Physical Education as a subject at the tertiary level, which is part of the overarching national goal for physical health and exercise among the youth. But the pace at which these sports activities were introduced has outpaced the level of development for aid in the form of infrastructural safety measures.

Numerous institutions still do not have proper facilities and equipment, creating difficulties for an instructor who has to ensure student safety.

For some reason, access to professional development is not well distributed geographically. Some universities appear to be well funded and provide organised training for PE staff, while others offer very little in the way of ongoing professional development. Inconsistencies regarding the implementation of the ‘safety’ concept are common as practitioners operate within different contexts. ‘Safety’ in this case is loosely defined and depends on local interpretations, customs, and culture. The increasing demand for university sports welfare programmes in Punjab and participation in sports at the university level tends to overstrain existing resources, which is particularly acute for PE instructors who have to deal with large classes and little instructional assistance.

Study Aims and Objectives

The study was designed with an overall objective of examining the perceptions and practices of sports safety measures by university PE instructors in Punjab, including the implementation barriers in place. More specifically, the study intends to address the following research questions:

How well does the PE instructor understand the significance of measures pertaining to sports safety?

How adequate is the implementation of safety measures throughout the conduct of sports activities in the universities of Punjab?

What are the limitations of a PE instructor concerning the safety of students during physical activity?

How do different PE instructors with varying experiences and educational qualifications perceive and practise sports safety within a given university context?

With these questions, the study hopes to make relevant recommendations for improving sports safety procedures in the university system in Punjab.

It is anticipated that the results will aid in enhancing policy and resource distribution decisions as well as systematised self-enhancement measures targeted at professionally preparing PE teachers to protect students' health.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

Exploring the existing perceptions and practices regarding sports safety among physical education teachers in the universities of Punjab was accomplished through a cross-sectional survey design. This method was chosen because it best captured pertinent data at a specific timeframe, thus providing a glimpse into the existing safety measures in university sports programmes. Instructors' experiences, perceptions, and visions regarding safety were captured through a survey that comprised both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Participants

The sample frame was made up of 93 physical education instructors teaching in public and private universities of Punjab. Utilising convenience sampling, in light of the sparse literature available on the topic, was a sound strategy considering the broad scope of the study and the difficult, spatially disparate, professional single-audience interactions.

To Be Included, Respondents Had to Satisfy the Following Requirements

- Currently working as a physical education instructor at a nominated university in Punjab.
- Possessing a minimum of one year of professional experience in physical education or equivalent discipline.
- Ready to provide informed consent for voluntary participation in the study.
- The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

The distribution of this population captures instructors from different institutions, highlighting their years of teaching experience and their professional encounter with safety measures in Table 2.

Instrumentation

A set of sports safety questionnaires [7, 10] was created based on previously validated research, and an instrument was provided. The instrument was reviewed for reliability and content clarity by 10 instructors and three experts for face and content validity. As outlined in Table 3, the questionnaire comprised four sections.

Reliability for the Perception and Implementation scales was measured using Cronbach's alpha for Sections ii and iii.

Table 1. Participant demographics (N=93).

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	66	71.0%
	Female	27	29.0%
Institution type	Public university	53	57.0%
	Private university	40	43.0%
Years of experience	1–5 years	24	25.8%
	6–10 years	38	40.9%
	Over 10 years	31	33.3%
Safety training	Received training	41	44.1%
	No training	52	55.9%

Table 2. Population distribution of demographic variable.

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	68	73.1
	Female	25	26.9
Institution type	Public university	54	58.1
	Private university	39	41.9
Years of experience	1–5 years	21	22.6
	6–10 years	40	43.0
	Above 10 years	32	34.4
Qualification	Master's in physical education	62	66.7
	PhD in physical education	31	33.3

Table 3. Description of questionnaire sections.

Section	Title	Description	Scale type
i.	Demographic information	Age, gender, academic qualifications, institutional affiliation, and years of experience.	Nominal and ordinal
ii.	Perception of sports safety measures	10 items measuring beliefs on the importance and responsibility of safety in university sports.	5-point Likert scale (1–5)
iii.	Implementation of safety practices	12 items assessing frequency of implementing practices like warm-ups, equipment checks, etc.	5-point Likert scale (1–5)
iv.	Barriers to implementation	3 open-ended questions eliciting instructors' views on practical challenges to implementing safety	Open-ended responses

- *Perception scale: α=0.84*
- *Implementation scale: α=0.87*
- *These values suggest that internal reliability is strong.*

Procedure for Data Collection

Teachers in the PE departments of universities were contacted directly, and they were sent an invitation, as well as an informed consent document explaining the study objectives and their rights as participants in the study, which allowed for voluntary participation devoid of personal identification. The composite of digitally (Google Forms) and physically submitted surveys during a 6-week period in the early months of 2025 was aimed at ensuring maximum participation rates to enhance data quality. Complete responses were estimated to take 15–20 minutes, with all of them password-protected and analysed using SPSS version 26 for computation purposes.

Data Examination

The evaluation of the data incorporated a hybrid of both descriptive and inferential methodologies.

Descriptive statistics: This involved the use of frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations to conclusively summarise scores of demographic and practice-related data aligned with perception-related responses.

Reliability analysis: Construction validity was used to check the internal reliability of the Likert-based questions using Cronbach's alpha.

Inferential Statistics

Determination of the association among perception scores and the implementation of safety practices were recorded using Pearson correlation coefficient.

Differences between groups, including public and private universities or male and female instructors were tested using independent samples t-tests.

Statistical Parameters were Defined as p <0.05

Qualitative assessment: Responses in Section IV were analysed thematically. The common underlying barriers, such as inadequate equipment, lack of attention from administration, and insufficient training were noted, classified, and accompanied with illustrative quotes.

Considerations on Ethics

This research is within the ethical bounds of educational research. Ethical approval was sought and granted by the institutional research ethics board prior to the commencement of data collection. The participants were:

- Informed of their option to voluntarily participate.
- Guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity.
- Allowed to withdraw at any point without any repercussions.

RESULTS

Demographic Information of Participants

A sum of 93 physical education (PE) teachers from different universities within Punjab participated in the study. The average age of participants was 38.5 years (SD=6.3), ranging from 29 to 52 years. Of the total sample, 53 were males (57%) while 40 were females (43%), indicating a reasonably balanced gender ratio. With regard to academic qualifications, 47% had a Master's degree in Physical Education, whereas 53% had or were studying for a PhD.

In relation to institutional affiliation, 64% of the respondents were working in public universities while the rest 36% were teaching in private universities.

Most participants (61%) cited over five years of work experience, suggesting that the respondent cohort has considerable interaction with the physical education teaching and the safety protocols within the university.

The study involved a total of 93 Physical Education (PE) instructors drawn from both public and private universities in Punjab (Table 4), with males constituting 57% and females 43% of the total respondents. This gender distribution is consistent with findings from Palikhe and Singh [1], who reported a male-dominated profile among PE professionals in India

Awareness and Perception of Sports Safety Policies

In general, the PE instructors in Punjab regard sports safety as a core component of physical education, which is a valued aspect of their teaching. Respondents indicated that they strongly value organised safety measures. For this aspect, the composite mean score was M=4.4 (SD=0.5), which pointed out that respondents universally endorsed fundamental injury mitigation, safety responsibilities, and safety benefits strongly along agreements.

Table 4. Summary of respondents' demographic characteristics (N=93)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	53	57.0
	Female	40	43.0
Age (Mean ± SD)	–	38.5 ± 6.3	–
Educational qualification	Master's degree	44	47.3
	Ph.D.	49	52.7
Years of experience	≤ 5 years	36	38.7
	> 5 years	57	61.3
Type of institution	Public university	60	64.5
	Private university	33	35.5

In Particular

79% of respondents believed that safety measures indeed would reduce the chances of sustaining injuries considerably.

83% stated that PE instructors generally are the foremost defenders of safety in sports.

Only 56% of respondents agreed that their institutions have adequate safety resources, including necessary equipment and supplies for emergencies.

There appears to be an imbalance between acknowledgment and institutional assistance. Instructors seem to value the importance of safety but do not have faith in systems to deliver it in a reliable manner.

Within the Implementation of Sports Safety Measures

Moderate safety measures were reported to be observed. Some instructors followed the best practice guidelines, but there was a lack of consistency in several critical areas of safety.

A considerable proportion (85%) noted that they regularly inspected sports equipment (M=4.2, SD=0.6), which is a better sign of proactive safety measures.

In the case of risk assessments, only 56% reported conducting routine assessments prior to the sporting activities, which indicates a lack of consistency (M=3.7, SD=0.8).

Approximately 70% of instructors reported that they made sure first aid kits were available and accessible during physical education lessons (M=4.1, SD=0.7).

Defensively applied protective gear, such as helmets and knee guards during contact sports, was used consistently by a comparably lower proportion of 45% (M=3.6, SD=1.1).

These results suggest that some foundational measures, such as equipment checks, are implemented, but other critical practices, like risk assessments and protective equipment usage are not consistently applied in Table 5.

Barriers to Implementation

Using the open-format responses, participants were tasked with describing the barriers that impede the implementation of sports safety measures within their institutions. These responses were analysed thematically to identify several common issues:

- *Insufficient funding*: The dominant barrier (given by 61% of respondents), includes a lack of financial resources towards acquiring new equipment, protective gear, and first aid kits.
- *Lack of formal training*: Approximately half of respondents (48%) claimed that due to a lack of employment training on sports safety procedures, emergency response, and injury handling, they had not been trained at all.
- *Institutional support*: A noteworthy proportion (42%) reported the absence of administrative support regarding the implementation of safety monitoring and a lack of written safety procedures on sports safety policy.

Participants also pointed out that large class sizes or overcrowded sessions create supervision problems, which heighten the risk of injury.

Table 5. Implementation of sports safety practices (N=93).

Practice	Mean (M)	Std. deviation (SD)	% agree or strongly agree
Regular inspection of sports equipment	4.2	0.6	85%
Conducting risk assessments before activities	3.7	0.8	56%
Ensuring availability of first aid kits	4.1	0.7	70%
Enforcing use of protective equipment	3.6	1.1	45%

A handful of instructors pointed out that academic focuses and time limitations often result in the overlooking of fully integrated safety education.

The qualitative responses point to the need for building capacity, shoring up structures, and strategically allocating resources towards the application of safety standards in university sports programmes.

Assumption Versus Action

In order to determine the relationship between instructors' perceptions of sports safety and the actual safety practices in place, instructor perception versus instructor practice, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed.

A modest positive correlation ($r=0.52$, $p < 0.01$) was noted, suggesting that instructors who believed in the safety issues a bit more tend to practice safety measures in a higher manner.

This outcome is in line with model reasoning frameworks concerning health behaviour, which posit that when conditions are conducive, positive attitudes can transform into actions.

The purpose of the current study was to assess the perception and practice of sports safety measures by university physical education (PE) instructors in Punjab, India. The results offer important information regarding attitudes and behaviours of instructors and the systemic barriers toward the implementation of sports safety measures. In general, participants showed a good level of awareness regarding safety issues in sports and physical education; however, a huge gap between perception and reality was noted. This gap also supports concerns raised in previous studies concerning the challenges of applying knowledge in practice.

Perception of Sports Safety: High Awareness but Limited Impact

In this study, instructors demonstrated high awareness of sports safety. Most participants agreed that having an organised system of safety protocols is vital in avoiding injuries in physical education classes.

The findings of this study reinforce the conclusions reached by previous research, which pointed out the major contributions instructors make towards developing a culture of safety in school and college sports. The perception level being high indicates that, at least from a theoretical standpoint, the instructor's knowledge base in Punjab is at an advanced stage, which is an encouraging sign for the implementation of effective safety measures.

But as this study brings out, perception on its own is not enough to drive change in behaviour. A number of instructors who acknowledged the need for safety did not put into practice several fundamental aspects of safety management, such as carrying out risk appraisal exercises or using protective equipment. This gap points towards the need to examine other more dominant factors – particularly organisational and contextual that are likely to be critical in shaping safety-related practices of the instructors.

Gap Between Knowledge and Application

The findings of the study indicate that participants did not reach the desired levels of implementation of sports safety measures. While basic activities for equipment checklists, such as checking the availability of first aid kits and the presence of required equipment were reported by almost all instructors, fewer reported actively instituting safety measures like the use of protective gear or conducting risk assessment checklists prior to activities. This suggests that PE instructors may be managing much of an established safety system in a reactive mode rather than a proactive one.

Previous research noted similar patterns in the educational setting, where instructors were frequently constrained by inadequate resources and administrative support.

The current study sounded similar to this one: the instructors wish to apply detailed safety measures, but they are constrained by systemic barriers such as inadequate training, funding, and support from the institution.

Moreover, the inconsistent enforcement of protective equipment usage reported by less than half of the respondents was a cause for concern, especially for sports that have a higher risk of physical injury. Protective equipment is one of the most important contributory factors in injury prevention, and its lack of use points to weaknesses in the current safety measures adopted by the institutions in Punjab.

Structural and Institutional Barriers

The study pointed out critical gaps in funding, institutional backing, training provided, and the number of students per class, which were identified as barriers to completing safety protocol checklists. These barriers suggest broader issues, which go far beyond the actions of a single instructor. In particular, lack of funding was the most frequently reported barrier. When these institutions do not provide appropriate funding for safety gear, maintenance of facilities, and even training for teaching staff, it is almost impossible for instructors to meet their safety obligations, even when they know what is expected of them.

Highlight that safety in sport at secondary and tertiary level educational institutions is not only the domain of the instructors, but also demands their guiding policies and active support.

These findings corroborate the perspective outlined in previous research. In the absence of adequate frameworks and leadership from the university administration, instructors attempt to manage safety within very restricted tools and capacity.

It is also noteworthy that nearly half of the respondents reported not receiving any formal training regarding the safety measures associated with their duties. As stated, continuing professional development (CPD) for physical education must encompass contemporary shifts in safety procedures and standards. The lack of opportunities for CPD in safety training can explain the inconsistencies in the implementation of safety practices and amplify the gulf between perception and practice.

Gender, Experience, and Type of Institution

The study did not conduct further inferential analysis by subdivided groups, but the demographic dispersion provides food for thought. In light of the fact that nearly 61% of respondents reported over five years of experience, it is indeed troubling that the level of safety practices remains moderate. One would assume that the number of teaching years translates to greater instantiation of safety measures, but these results point to the possibility that organisational factors outbalance individual experience when it comes to the determinants of safety.

Furthermore, the inclusion of both male and female instructors from the sample indicates the presence of a balanced view, but further studies may investigate whether there are gendered impacts regarding the facets of safety, access, resources, and support.

The split between public and private universities, at 64% and 36%, respectively, also raises important issues regarding the disparity in resources. Indian public universities are often underfunded, have ageing infrastructure, and high congestion and understaffing. These limitations could explain the greater implementation difficulties reported by instructors in these institutions.

Within Impression and Execution

The correlation between perception and implementation is moderate and statistically significant at $r=0.52$, $p<0.01$. This result supports perception theory, which posits that individuals who firmly hold a belief about the value of a particular behaviour will undertake it if they believe they have adequate resources and control over relevant means. This study affirms such a theoretical proposition, but

emphasises the gap of control defined in this case as institutional and structural constraints bound within those framed prior.

Furthermore, this correlation suggests that providing additional resources to address controlled restrictions, often defined as perception, is unlikely to be effective.

To create an ecosystem where their perceptions can be enacted into action, instructor training, supportive policies, resource distribution, and accountability frameworks need to be integrated into single, multi-level policies.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

As a result of this research, educational policy makers, university leaders, and stakeholders in physical education should take notice of these recommendations:

- *Development of institutional policies*: Formal safety policies should be put into place by universities, which will include descriptions for instructors, emergency response procedures, and basic equipment usage and facility maintenance policies.
- *Funding distribution*: Institutions must direct funding towards safety equipment and infrastructure. Sponsorships from the University Grants Commission (UGC) and other state departments of education for region-wide sports safety initiatives should also be made available.

Instructor training and continuing professional development: Sports safety should be taught in mandatory faculty development workshops. Injury control, planning for emergencies, and assessing risks are some topics that should be included in these workshops.

Evaluation and accountability: Responding to feedback from students, instructors, and compliance checks should become a practice by which safety in PE programmes is reviewed regularly at the institutional level.

Integrative teaching: Students should be trained to actively take responsibility for promoting appropriate procedures through the interdisciplinary approach to safety in physical education classes.

CONCLUSION

The study focused on the sports safety perception and practice continuum by diving deep into the world of sports PE instructors in Punjab and their practices.

The results indicated a considerable level of awareness among instructors regarding the need for sports safety; nonetheless, there is an implementation gap in the application of safety measures. Major constraints such as lack of appropriate funding, under support from the institution, and insufficient professional development stifle the attainment of safety practices.

Although instructors performed basic safety checks, more proactive measures, such as risk assessments and enforcement of protective equipment, were applied less consistently. These findings necessitate that without action at the systemic level, knowledge of safety will not result in practice.

Recommendations

Institutional support and funding: Sport departments need a dedicated budget for the purchase and maintenance of sports safety equipment, facilities, and emergency preparedness resources.

Professional development: Sports PE instructors' professional development must include regular training and workshops on sports safety procedures.

Policy formulation: Comprehensive sports safety policies must be formulated and instituted by higher learning institutions, including standardised protocols for risk assessment and injury prevention.

Monitoring and evaluation: Internal auditing systems to safety practices should be put in place to ensure accountability and enable continuous enhancement.

Integration into curriculum: Cultivating a safety culture aimed at students should be included in the PE curriculum, making safety education a part of their early education.

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