Research article

WEIGHT CATEGORIES IN JUDO: ARE THE DIFFERENCES ONLY PHYSICAL?

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Abstract. *This study explores the relationship between weight categories and personality traits among male judokas, focusing on psychological differences alongside well-documented physical and performance-related attributes. The aim was to compare emotional competence, personality traits and perceived self-efficacy across lightweight, middleweight, and heavyweight judo categories. The sample included 28 male judokas with over seven years of training and national competitive success, divided into lighter (n=15; -60kg, -66kg, -73kg and 81kg) and heavier (n=13; -90kg, -100kg and +100kg) categories. Psychological traits were assessed using the Emotional Competence Questionnaire, HEXACO-PI-R, PANAS, and the Perceived Social Self-Efficacy Scale. Statistical analyses included independent samples t-tests, Pearson correlations, and canonical discriminant analysis. The findings revealed significant differences in emotionality, with lightweight and middleweight judokas exhibiting higher levels compared to heavyweights. Heavier judokas displayed lower emotional expressiveness and a lower ability of managing emotions, along with reduced negative affect. In contrast, lighter judokas demonstrated higher openness to experience, conscientiousness, and cooperativeness. Additionally, conscientiousness correlated positively with age. These results highlight the need for tailored coaching approaches to address the distinct psychological profiles of judokas in different weight categories. While heavyweight judokas may require support to identify and manage latent psychological needs, lightweight athletes could benefit from enhanced emotional support.*

Key words: *judokas, weight categories, personality traits, emotional competence, self-efficacy*

INTRODUCTION

Judo, a martial art originating in Japan, has evolved into a highly competitive combat sport practiced globally. It is represented by 208 national federations that are members of the International Judo Federation (International Judo Federation, 2024). High performance in judo requires an approach that integrates physical conditioning, technical skills, tactical knowledge and psychological variables (Santos et al., 2015). Judo athletes must develop specific physical conditioning, including strength, power, flexibility, and endurance, to excel in this high-intensity, intermittent combat sport. Research indicates that muscle mass and maximal muscle strength are critical determinants of success in judo competitions, as these attributes directly influence an athlete's ability to execute techniques effectively and withstand the physical demands of bouts (Kyoungho, & Tae-Beom, 2021; Prieske et al., 2020; Franchini et al., 2011). Elite judo athletes not only require superior physical attributes but also a deep understanding of techniques and strategies to outmaneuver opponents (Santos et al., 2015; Broussal-Derval, 2019). According to coaches, psychological preparation is also considered as one of the most critical factors for achieving top-level performance (Santos et al. 2015; Sterkowicz, Garcià, & Lerma, 2007).

The psychological aspects of judo play a significant role in judokas performance and overall success in the sport. Psychological characteristics, such as motivation, anxiety management, and mood states, significantly influence judo athletes' performance outcomes. For instance, athletes with higher motivation levels tend to exhibit superior mental efficiency and lower impulsivity, which can enhance their performance during competitions (Rossi et al., 2022). Ribeiro et al. (2022) emphasize that psychosocial factors play a significant role, as retrospective studies involving Olympic judo athletes highlight the critical importance of psychological skills like determination and resilience under pressure, as well as the vital role of family support. Professional judo athletes typically exhibit low levels of aggression, particularly in terms of indirect and physical aggression. Furthermore, they display strong traits of Honesty-Humility and Openness to Experience, while Emotionality and Extraversion are less prominent. Their general self-efficacy tends to be moderate (Stankovic et al., 2022). In general, elite athletes are characterized by emotionality and openness to experience and also emotional competence (Mitic et al., 2021), and it is established that the social self-efficacy level of athlete is higher than non-athletes (Yildirim, Koçak, & Parlakyildiz, 2024). When it comes to judokas, research indicates that they exhibit higher achievements on the emotional intelligence scale and the subscale for emotion regulation compared to recreational athletes (Mitic et al., 2011). This finding also applies to student-athletes engaged in or favoring martial arts (Todorović et al., 2013). The influence of emotional intelligence on athletic performance is often associated with a lower increase in stress levels (Laborde, Brüll, Weber & Anders, 2011). Furthermore, studies have explored the relationship between stress coping mechanisms and both positive and negative affect in judokas (Brazão & Castellani, 2021), as well as in martial artists in general (Xu et al., 2020). Combat sports are typically organized into distinct weight classes to ensure fair and balanced competition. This classification system is designed to match athletes with similar physical characteristics, such as body weight and stature, thereby minimizing the potential for size and strength disparities to unduly influence the outcome of a match. By

aligning competitors of comparable body mass, weight classes aim to emphasize skill, strategy, and technique rather than physical dominance (Langan-Evans, Close, & Morton, 2011). The classification of athletes into weight categories influences various performance metrics.

Firstly, anthropometric profiles reveal significant variations between weight categories. Heavier judokas typically exhibit higher body fat percentages and greater muscle mass compared to their lighter counterparts (Franchini et al., 2014). Lighter judokas (-60kg, -66kg, -73kg) often present lower fat percentages and distinct somatotype profiles than heavier judokas (-81kg, -90kg, -100kg, over 100kg), with mesomorphy being predominant among elite male athletes (Drapšin et al., 2020; Franchini et al., 2014). Moreover, the technical-tactical behaviors of judokas vary significantly across weight categories. Research has shown that lighter and heavier athletes engage in different combat strategies, with lighter judokas often employing faster, more dynamic movements, while heavier judokas may rely on strength and stability (Santos, 2024; Sterkowicz-Przybycień et al., 2017). The combat-phase analysis indicates that lighter athletes tend to execute more rapid actions, while heavier athletes may have longer pause phases, reflecting their reliance on strength-based techniques (Sterkowicz-Przybycień et al., 2017). Heavier judokas are more efficient with less throwing attempts, but receive more penalties than lighter judokas (Stankovic et al., 2015; Escobar-Molina et al., 2014). Judokas in lighter weight categories are more frequently engaged in pre-competition weight reduction and are consequently more exposed to and likely to adopt harmful practices to achieve the desired weight, since the heavyweight judokas do not have weight limit as in wrestling (United World Wrestling, 2024).

It is evident that judokas in lighter and heavier weight categories exhibit differences in anthropometric characteristics, somatotype, strength, motor abilities, technical and tactical approaches, as well as weight management strategies and their associated implications. Therefore, it is both logical and valuable to investigate whether psychological aspects, including personality traits, align with these physical and performance-related differences across weight categories.

The aim of this study is to analyze and compare the personality traits of judokas competing in lighter and heavier weight categories to determine whether psychological characteristics differ between these groups.

METHOD

Participants

The research sample consisted of 28 male judokas who have been training judo for over seven years and have achieved notable competitive success (medals at the junior or senior national competition). For the purposes of this study, the sample was divided into two groups: those competing in light and middleweight categories (n=15; -60kg, -66kg, -73kg and 81kg) and those competing in heavyweight categories (n=13; -90kg, -100kg and +100kg).

Instruments

The Emotional Competence Questionnaire (UEK-15) is a shortened version of the UEK-45 questionnaire (Takšić, 2002). It consists of 15 statements, to which respondents provide answers by selecting one of the numbers on a five-point Likert scale. The responses reflect the respondent's self-assessed development of emotional competence. In addition to the total score, the questionnaire provides scores on the following subscales: the ability to perceive and understand emotions, the ability to express and label emotions, and the ability to manage and regulate emotions.

HEXACO-PI-R, which consists of 60 items, was used in order to determine personality traits: Honesty, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness (Lee and Ashton, 2008).

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). The PANAS (Watson et al., 1988) consists of 20 items measuring positive affect and negative affect with 10 items each. Instrument was validated in Serbian population (Mihić et al., 2014).

Perceived Social Self-Efficacy Scale (PSSE) was used to estimate measures someone's beliefs in own capabilities to work cooperatively and share personal experiences with others, and also to manage interpersonal conflicts (Smith & Betz, 2000). The scale is one-dimensional and consists of 25 items, with responses provided on a five-point Likert scale.

Statistical analysis

Independent samples t-test, Pearson's correlation coefficient, and canonical discriminant analysis were the statistical techniques employed for data processing. These methods were chosen to examine differences between groups, evaluate the strength and direction of relationships between variables, and identify patterns that differentiate groups based on a combination of predictors, respectively. By integrating these techniques, the analysis aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the data and its underlying relationships.

RESULTS

It was found that there are statistically significant differences in the personality trait Emotionality (tendency towards neuroticism) among judokas of different weight categories. Athletes in the lightweight and middleweight categories are statistically significantly more emotional compared to their counterparts in the heavyweight category (results presented in Table 1). No statistically significant differences were found in other personality traits, emotional competence, social self-efficacy, or the expression of positive and negative emotions, regardless of whether they belong to the lightweight/middleweight or heavyweight category.

Through correlational analyses (findings presented in Table 2), it was determined that there is a negative correlation between the category of judokas (expressed through body weight) and the personality trait of Emotionality. This means that as body weight increases among judokas, the Emotionality trait becomes less pronounced, and judokas with lower body weight are more emotionally expressive. The results indicate that the personality trait of Conscientiousness is more pronounced in older judokas, and this correlation is statistically significant.

Table 1 Differences in the Expression of Personality Traits, Aspects of Emotional Competence, Social Self-Efficacy, and the Expression of Positive and Negative Emotions Among Judokas of Different Categories

	Category 1-Light and Middleweight 2-Heavyweight	N	M	p
Honesty	Light and Middleweight Heavyweight	15 13	33.6667 33.5385	.955
Emotionality	Light and Middleweight Heavyweight	15 13	28.0000 23.9231	.046
Extraversion	Light and Middleweight Heavyweight	15 13	36.9333 36.6923	.910
Agreeableness	Light and Middleweight Heavyweight	15 13	30.4000 29.3846	.682
Conscientiousness	Light and Middleweight Heavyweight	15 13	33.9333 35.9231	.461
Openness	Light and Middleweight Heavyweight	15 13	31.1333 29.3846	.380
Emotion_regulation	Light and Middleweight Heavyweight	15 13	20.0667 18.9231	.311
Emotion_expression	Light and Middleweight Heavyweight	15 13	19.4667 18.1538	.341
Emotion_understanding	Light and Middleweight Heavyweight	15 13	20.5333 20.7692	.853
Social_selfefficacy	Light and Middleweight Heavyweight	14 13	99.4286 98.4615	.870
Positive_emotions	Light and Middleweight Heavyweight	15 13	40.4000 40.1538	.904
Negative_emotions	Light and Middleweight Heavyweight	15 13	24.2667 21.4615	.421
PANAS_general_score	Light and Middleweight Heavyweight	15 13	64.6667 61.6154	.398

Table 2 Correlation Between the Expression of Different Personality Traits, Aspects of Emotional Competence, Social Self-Efficacy, and the Expression of Positive and Negative Emotions with Category Expressed Through Weight Category, Age, and Years of Judo Training

		Weight Category	Age	Years of judo training
Honesty	Pearson Correlation	.084	.303	.129
	P	.669	.116	.513
	N	28	28	28
Emotionality	Pearson Correlation	-.484**	-.227	-.048
	P	.009	.245	.808
	N	28	28	28
Extraversion	Pearson Correlation	.197	.223	.027
	P	.315	.253	.891
	N	28	28	28
Agreeableness	Pearson Correlation	-.022	.288	.158
	P	.910	.137	.422
	N	28	28	28
Conscientiousness	Pearson Correlation	.206	.378*	.142
	P	.294	.047	.472
	N	28	28	28
Openness	Pearson Correlation	-.198	.209	.038
	P	.313	.286	.848
	N	28	28	28
Emotion_regulation	Pearson Correlation	-.091	.113	-.005
	P	.645	.566	.980
	N	28	28	28
Emotion_expression	Pearson Correlation	-.106	.266	.218
	P	.590	.171	.264
	N	28	28	28
Emotion_understanding	Pearson Correlation	.026	.268	.170
	P	.896	.168	.386
	N	28	28	28
Social_selfefficacy	Pearson Correlation	.109	.307	.179
	P	.590	.119	.371
	N	27	27	27
Positive_emotions	Pearson Correlation	-.080	-.084	-.118
	P	.684	.669	.550
	N	28	28	28
Negative_emotions	Pearson Correlation	-.172	-.077	.067
	P	.382	.697	.735
	N	28	28	28
PANAS_general_score	Pearson Correlation	-.211	-.122	-.002
	P	.281	.537	.992
	N	28	28	28

All previously obtained results were supported by findings derived from the method of canonical discriminant analysis. To determine whether it is possible to differentiate judokas in the lightweight and middleweight categories from those in the heavyweight category, based on a set of variables including aspects of emotional competence, social self-efficacy, the expression of positive and negative emotions according to the PANAS scale, as well as personality traits according to the HEXACO model, the method of canonical discriminant analysis was applied.

Table 3 Chi-square and functions at group centroids of canonical discriminant functions

Wilks' Lambda	Chi-square	Sig.	Function 1	
.475	84.605	.000	Light and Middleweight	.783
			Heavyweight	-.884

The values of group centroids (average discriminant scores for each group, Table 4) range from 0.783 for judokas in the lightweight and middleweight categories to -0.884 for judokas in the heavyweight category. The discriminant function was conducted for twelve factors, with Wilks' Lambda = 0.475, Chi-square = 84.605, $p < 0.01$.

Table 4 Means and structure matrix of the canonical discriminant functions

	Light and Middleweight	Heavyweight	Stand. Can. Disc. Func. Coef.
	Mean	Mean	
Emotionality	33.8571	33.5385	.546
Emotion_expression	27.6429	23.9231	.422
Emotion_regulation	37.2143	36.6923	.488
Openness	30.6429	29.3846	.389
Negative_emotions	31.0000	29.3846	.465
Conscientiousness	20.2857	18.9231	-.331
Agreeableness	19.9286	18.1538	.418
Extraversion	20.7857	20.7692	.057
Social_selfefficacy	99.4286	98.4615	.039
Honesty	40.4286	40.1538	.032
Positive_emotions	23.9286	21.4615	.031
Emotion_understanding	64.3571	61.6154	.003

Based on the data presented in Table 4, it can be concluded that heavyweight judokas are characterized by a low level of Emotionality as a personality trait according to the HEXACO model, as well as a lower level of emotional expressiveness and the ability to control and manage emotions, particularly with less pronounced negative emotions according to the PANAS scale. On the other hand, judokas in the lightweight and middleweight categories are characterized by greater openness to new experiences, higher levels of conscientiousness, and cooperativeness, as defined by the HEXACO personality model.

DISCUSSION

The finding that judokas in lightweight and middleweight categories exhibit a statistically significant higher level of emotionality compared to those competing in heavyweight categories is particularly intriguing when considered within the behavioral implications of this trait. Specifically, individuals scoring high on this scale tend to experience fear of physical danger, anxiety in response to life stressors, a need for emotional support from others, empathy, and sentimental connection with others (Lee & Ashton, 2004, 2008). According to the results of this study, these characteristics are more prominent among judokas in the lighter categories. This distinction could have practical implications, as it suggests that coaches might need to adopt a significantly different approach during pre-competition preparation. Additionally, it indicates that athletes in these categories may benefit more from interventions by sports psychologists.

In contrast, judokas in heavyweight categories are characterized by lower scores on the emotionality scale, describing them as individuals who do not fear physical injuries, remain unconcerned even in stressful situations, and are less likely to share their worries with others (Lee & Ashton, 2004, 2008). While this might initially seem to ease the coaching process during training and competition, it may also obscure underlying psychological needs that require attention.

The study also found that the personality trait of conscientiousness is more pronounced in older judokas. However, this finding offers limited informational value as conscientiousness—defined by characteristics such as organization, diligence, perfectionism, and prudence (Lee & Ashton, 2004, 2008) tends to develop with experience.

The study identified a distinct set of personality traits associated with judokas in lighter versus heavier categories. Heavyweight judokas demonstrate lower levels of emotionality, reduced emotional expressiveness, and a lower ability of managing and regulating emotions, along with particularly low levels of negative affect. This finding contrasts with previous research (Lane & Wilson, 2011), which linked higher emotional intelligence to a greater frequency of positive emotions over negative ones. However, the psychological profile of heavyweights in this study reflects lower negative affectivity and less pronounced emotional intelligence.

Judokas in lightweight and middleweight categories are characterized by higher openness to new experiences, greater conscientiousness, and higher agreeableness according to the HEXACO personality model. These judokas exhibit curiosity, creativity, and nonconformity, as well as disciplined work towards their goals, a drive for accuracy and perfection, careful decision-making, forgiveness, humility, flexibility, and patience

(Lee & Ashton, 2004, 2008). While these traits differentiate them from heavyweights, they also suggest that these athletes may require a tailored coaching approach, as it is suggested in the literature (Ziv & Lidor, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The study revealed differences in psychological traits among judokas based on their weight categories. These results can facilitate a deeper understanding of the psychological functioning of different judokas and provide practical guidance for coaches working with athletes in specific categories. The primary limitation of the study is the relatively small sample size, including only males. Future research in this area should consider including a larger number of participants and incorporating coaches' perceptions of working with judokas across different weight categories.

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TEŽINSKE KATEGORIJE U DŽUDOU:
DA LI SU RAZLIKE SAMO FIZIČKE?

Ovo istraživanje bavi se odnosom između težinskih kategorija i osobina ličnosti kod muških džudista, s fokusom na psihološke razlike pored dobro dokumentovanih fizičkih i performansnih karakteristika. Cilj je bio da se uporede emocionalna kompetencija, osobine ličnosti i percipirana samoefikasnost u lakoj, srednjoj i teškoj težinskoj kategoriji džuda. Uzorak je uključivao 28 muških džudista sa preko sedam godina treninga i nacionalnim takmičarskim uspehom, podeljenih u lakše (n=15; -60kg, -66kg, -73kg i -81kg) i teže (n=13; -90kg, -100kg i +100kg) kategorije. Psihološke karakteristike su procenjivane pomoću Upitnika emocionalne kompetencije, HEXACO-PI-R, PANAS-a i Skale percipirane socijalne samoefikasnosti. Statističke analize su obuhvatile t-testove za nezavisne uzorke, Pirsonove korelacije i kanoničku diskriminantnu analizu. Rezultati su otkrili značajne razlike u emocionalnosti: džudisti iz lakih i srednjih kategorija pokazali su viši nivo u poređenju sa teškašima. Teži džudisti pokazali su nižu emocionalnu izražajnost i slabije sposobnosti u upravljanju emocijama, uz smanjeni negativni afekt. Nasuprot tome, lakši džudisti iskazali su veću otvorenost za nova iskustva, savesnost i kooperativnost. Pored toga, savesnost je pozitivno korelisala sa godinama. Ovi rezultati naglašavaju potrebu za prilagođenim pristupima treniranju kako bi se u fokusu našli različiti psihološki profili džudista u različitim težinskim kategorijama. Dok teži džudisti mogu zahtevati podršku za identifikaciju i upravljanje latentnim psihološkim potrebama, lakši sportisti bi mogli imati koristi od pojačane emocionalne podrške.

Ključne reči: *džudisti, težinske kategorije, osobine ličnosti, emocionalna kompetencija, samoefikasnost*