High-risk sport research

Dominika Kupciw and Alexandra MacGregor highlight the advances, practical implications and future directions in high-risk sport research.

The height of the skiing season is upon us, and many snow riders are gearing up to hit the slopes around the world. Every winter more of us look for ways to make our skiing holidays unforgettable and the temptation to venture off the marked slopes in search of fresh powder has never been stronger. However, many winter sports enthusiasts were recently forced to re-evaluate their safety measures after the tragic death of the young and talented freestyle skier Sarah Burke. Sarah died following a training session crash, causing her irreversible brain damage. Although many professional skiier Sarah Burke. Sarah died following a training session crash, causing her irreversible brain damage. The concept of risky sports is of great interest, and the increased interest in high-risk sports has been driven by factors such as economic expansion; it is the driving force behind discoveries and scientific development. The need for individuals to take risks is a fundamental aspect of human nature; the caveman would not have emerged from the cave to feed his family if he hadn’t taken risks. Thus, when proposing any preventative or safety strategies for high-risk sport participation it is important to recognize and maintain the element of risk that many participants specifically strive for. With the world Qiying enjoying its place in the Winter Olympics and current proposals by the International Sailing Federation for the inclusion of new sports in the 2016 Olympic Games, the popularity of high-risk sports is on the rise. This amplifying interest in high-risk sport translates into increased risk-taking behaviour in both physical and social domains. Clear, some individuals will want to put themselves in situations that are so dangerous that the consequence of falling is almost certainly death. However, the results from our study show that engaging in certain behaviours (i.e., precautionary behaviour) reduces the likelihood of such fatalities occurring.

Accidents

Accidents are common in many sports, but the nature of high-risk sports means that accidents are likely to be more traumatic and potentially fatal. In terms of reducing the number of accidents occurring in such sports, an understanding of the behaviours that may predispose someone to becoming more accident-prone is important. We found that engaging in deliberate risky behaviours was associated with a greater propensity for accidents and accidents, whereas engaging in precautionary behaviours (e.g., taking time to check for potential hazards) in high-risk sports. Deliberate risky behaviours reflect a lack of understanding and consideration for the high-risk environment, whereas precautionary behaviours reflect careful planning and a high degree of awareness for the risks associated with high-risk sports. As well as examining the psychometric properties of the RTSI, we used the measure to examine two key questions:

1. Are deliberate risky behaviours associated with a greater number of near misses and accidents than precautionary behaviours?
2. Are certain personality traits associated with engaging in either deliberate risky behaviours or precautionary behaviours?

Practical implications

“If human fate felt no temptation to take a deliberate risk, that might be made investment merely as a result of cold calculation.” (John

Further Reading


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28 29