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# MENTAL HEALTH AND PERFORMANCE UNDER PRESSURE AMONG ATHLETES



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# INTERSECTION

**WE ARE ALL ON A JOURNEY AND OUR EXPERIENCES SHAPE US**



Quellenangabe

Let's Talk About Mental Health and Mental Disorders in Elite Sports: A Narrative Review of Theoretical Perspectives

 Carolina Lundqvist<sup>1\*</sup>  Gerhard Andersson<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Mental disorders in athletes — A proper diagnostic pathway is important but no need to reinvent the wheel

Carolina Lundqvist<sup>a,b</sup>, Tim Meyer<sup>c</sup>

Research Article

**Toxic leadership in high-performance sports and its consequences for mental health and performance: a scoping review**

Carolina Lundqvist<sup>a</sup>, Jeroen Camps<sup>b</sup>, Tine Vertommen<sup>c</sup>, Natalie Barker-Ruchti<sup>d</sup> & Örn Kolbeinsson<sup>e</sup>

Received 21 Jan 2024, Accepted 15 Jan 2025, Published online: 25 Jan 2025

**Aligning categories of mental health conditions with intervention types in high-performance sports: A narrative cornerstone review and classification framework**




Carolina Lundqvist<sup>1</sup>, David P Schary<sup>2</sup>, Jenny Jacobsson<sup>3</sup>, Laura Korhonen<sup>4</sup>, Toomas Timpka<sup>5</sup>

Sport and Exercise Psychology

**Prevalence of harassment, abuse, and mental health among current and retired senior Swedish cheerleaders**

Carolina Lundqvist<sup>a</sup>

Pages 1673-1684 | Received 03 Feb 2024, Accepted 11 Sep 2024, Published online: 28 Sep 2024

 Cite this article  <https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2024.2405791>  Check for updates

**OPEN** **A psychometric study of the team psychological safety scale and sport psychological safety inventory in Swedish elite sports**

Carolina Lundqvist<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Stéphane Bermon<sup>3,4</sup> & Toomas Timpka<sup>2,5</sup>



Wellbeing & Mental  
health

Life & Sports

Performance



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DOI: 10.1080/1750984X.2011.584067 • Corpus ID: 144940954

## Well-being in competitive sports—The feel-good factor? A review of conceptual considerations of well-being

C. Lundqvist • Published 3 June 2011 • Psychology • International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology





# ELITE ATHLETES ARE HUMANS

**NOT INVULNERABLE  
„SUPERHUMANS“**

Athletes, coaches, and others involved in sport are not immune to mental disorders and can face life and sport challenges that negatively impact their mental health or may represent triggers for disorders becoming manifest



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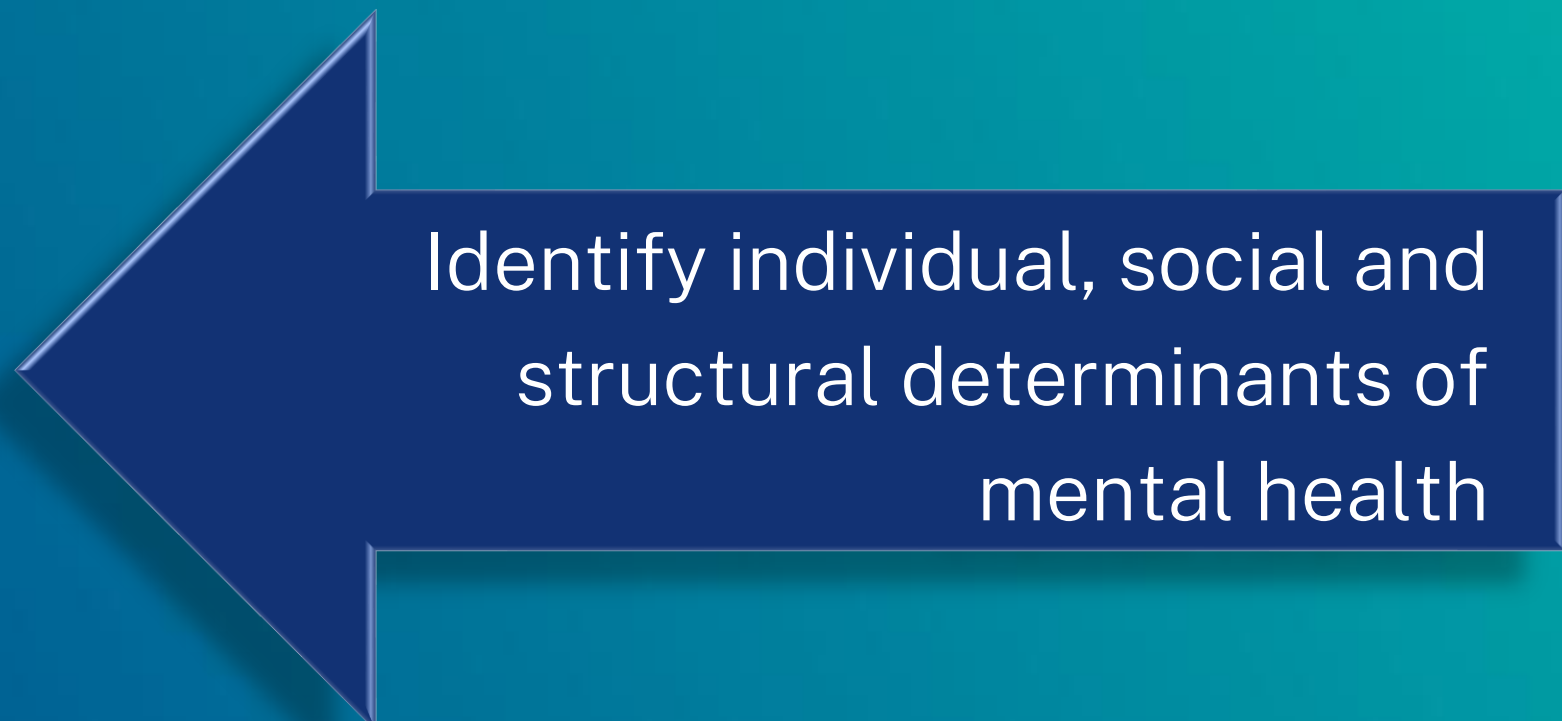


# MENTAL HEALTH


Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being [..]

Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders. It exists on a complex continuum, which is experienced differently from one person to the next, with varying degrees of difficulty and distress and potentially very different social and clinical outcomes

Mental health conditions include mental disorders and psychosocial disabilities as well as other mental states associated with significant distress, impairment in functioning, or risk of self-harm

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Identify individual, social and structural determinants of mental health

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Intervene to reduce risks, build resilience and establish supportive environments

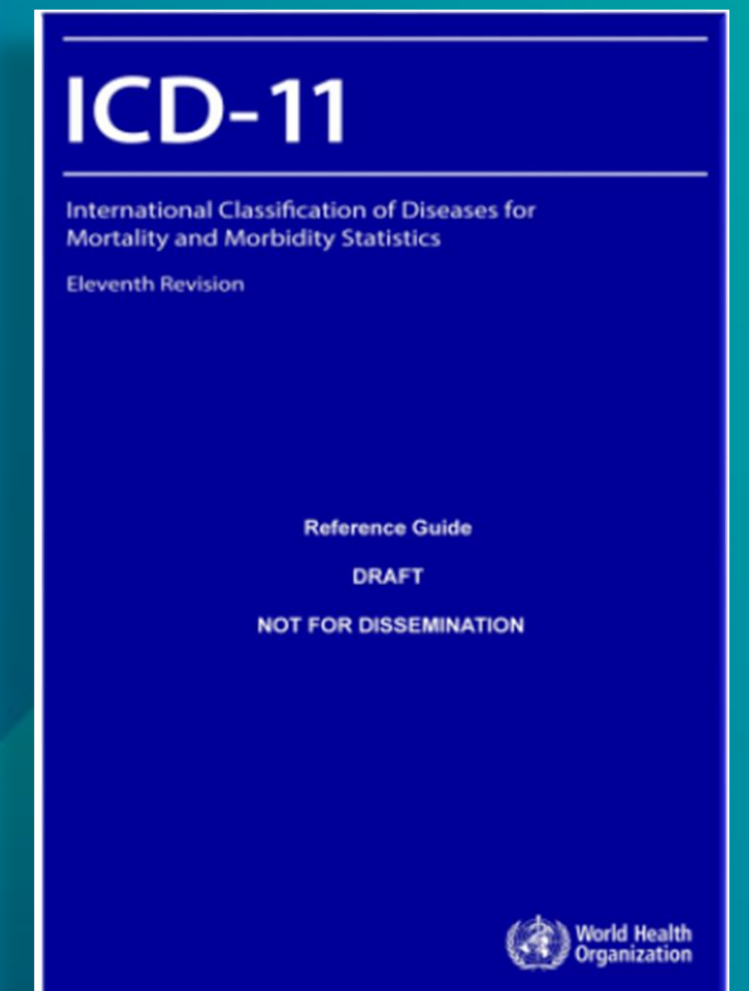
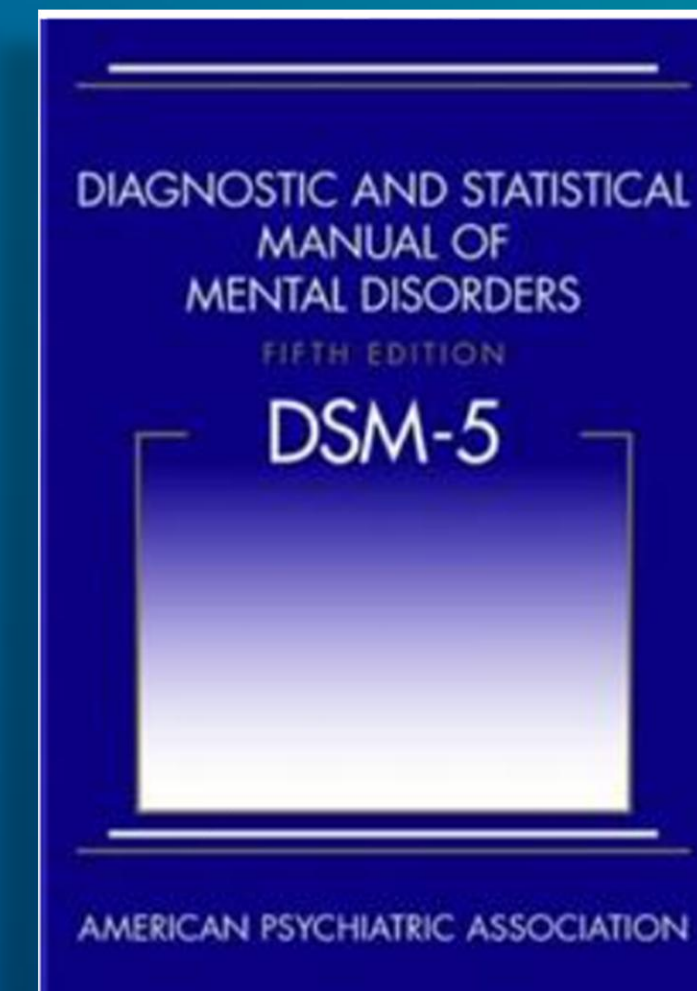


# A "HOT TOPIC" IN SPORTS RESEARCH

Psychological and sociological factors associated with well-being and mental health in sports has been studied for decades

The psychiatric discourse is more recent: Medical terminology and language, focus on diagnostic criteria, and treatment approaches

- Prevalence studies
- Stigma and hesitation to seek help for mental health issues
- Mental health literacy programs
- Mental health recommendations/consensus statements



# ELITE ATHLETE

**A PERSON WHO EXCELS IN SPORTS AND ATHLETICALLY PERFORMS AT A HIGH LEVEL**

Epidemiological studies suggest that psychiatric disorders are likely as prevalent amongst high-performance athletes as in general populations

Some psychiatric disorders are linked with higher mortality (e.g., major depression disorder, eating disorders)

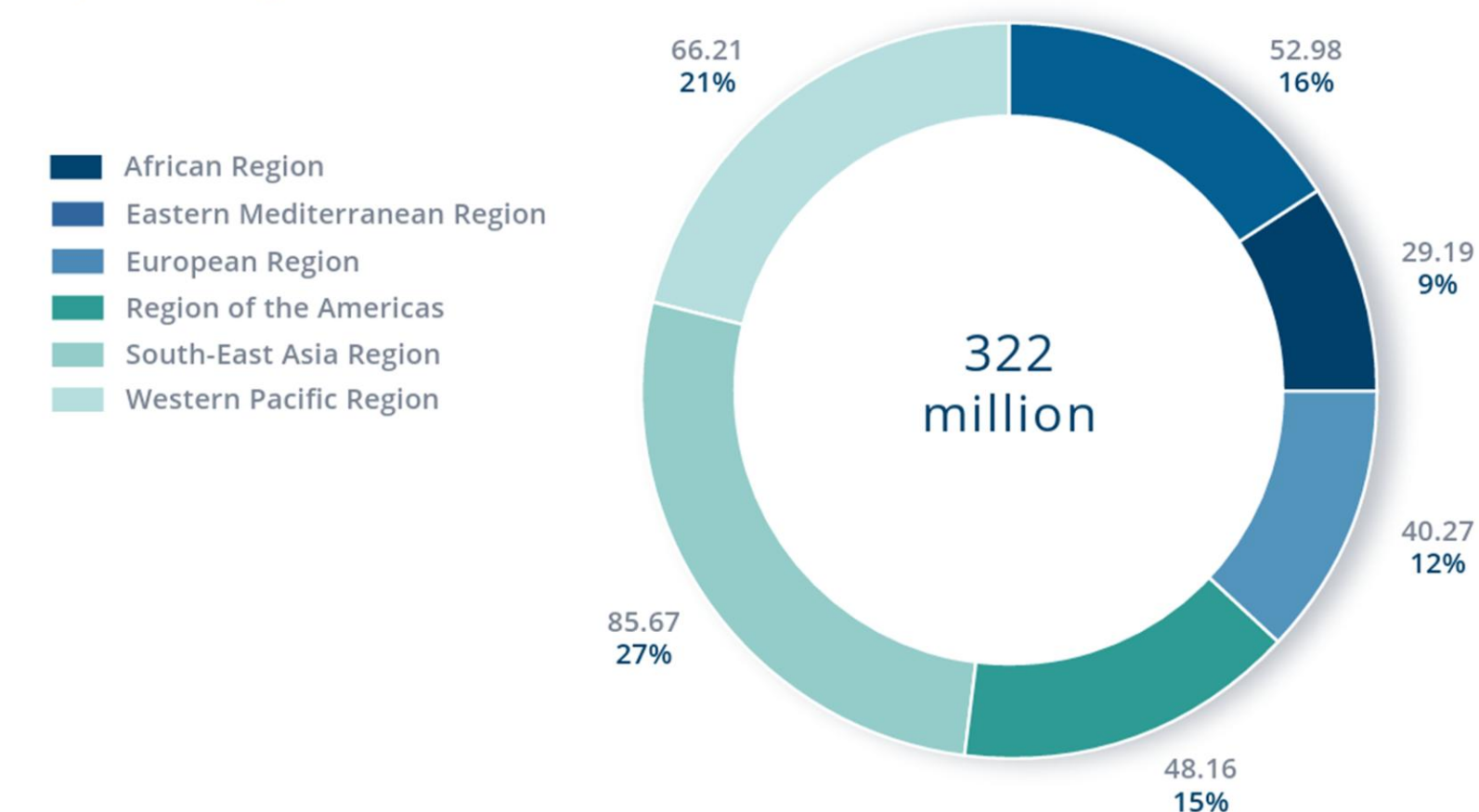
Original research

**Suicide in National Collegiate Athletic Association athletes: a 20-year analysis** FREE *Br J Sports Med* 2024;58:531–537

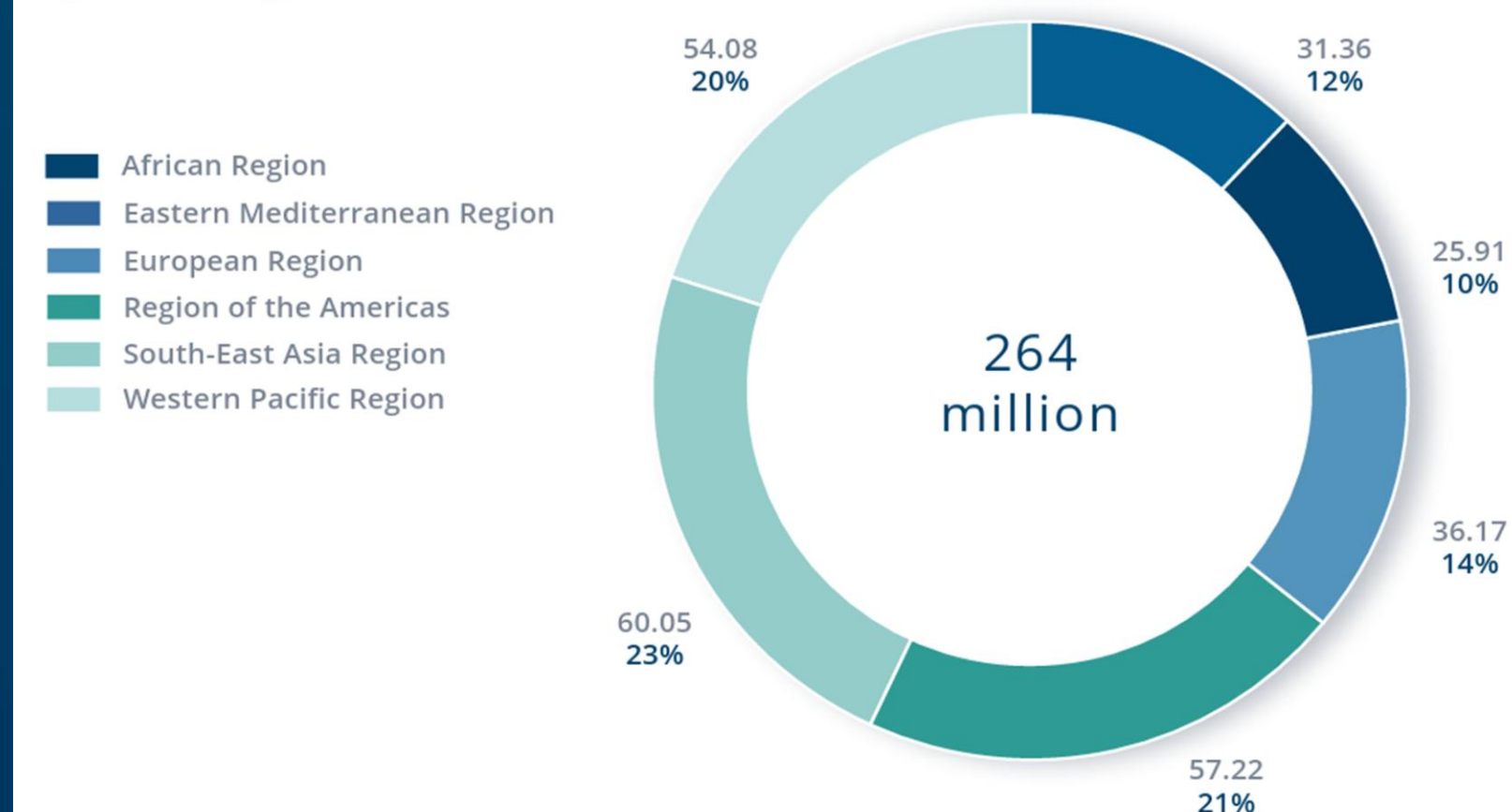
 Bridget M Whelan <sup>1</sup>,  Stephanie A Kliethermes <sup>2</sup>, Kelly A Schloredt <sup>1</sup>, Ashwin Rao <sup>1</sup>,  Kimberly G Harmon <sup>1</sup>, 

Bradley J Petek <sup>3</sup>

**Cases of depressive disorder (millions),  
by WHO Region**



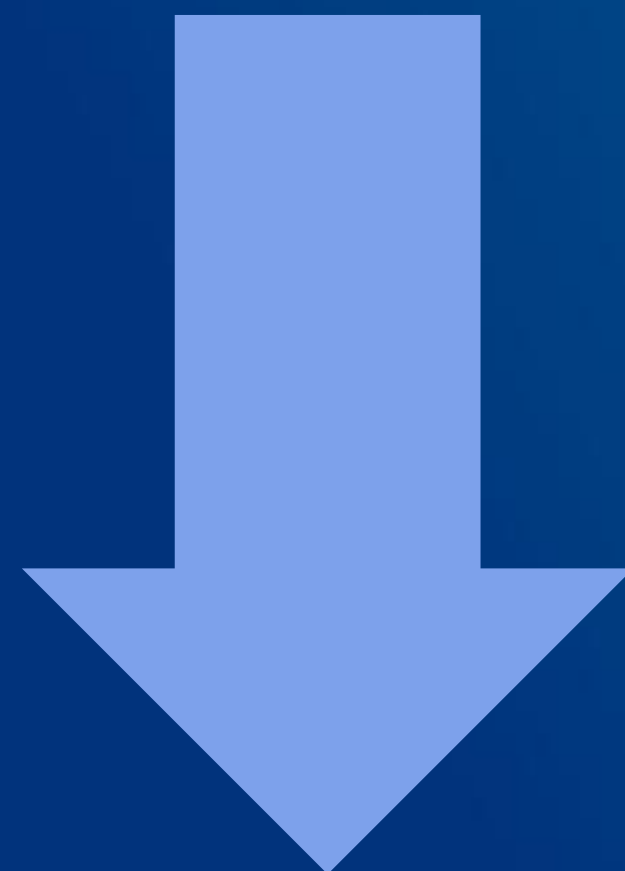
**Cases of anxiety disorder (millions),  
by WHO Region**



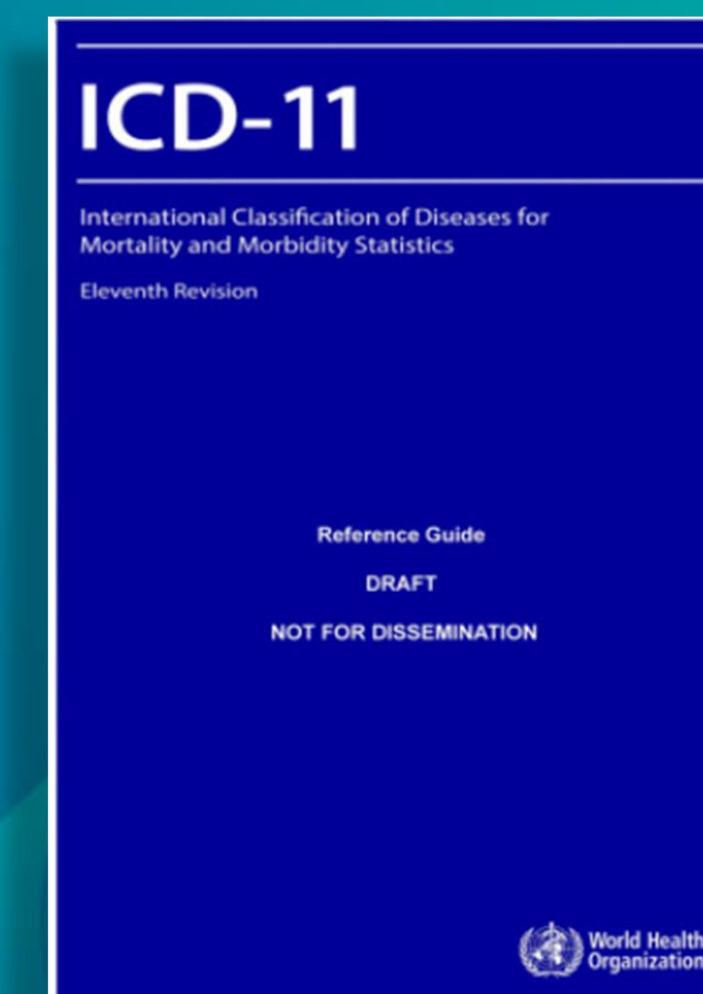
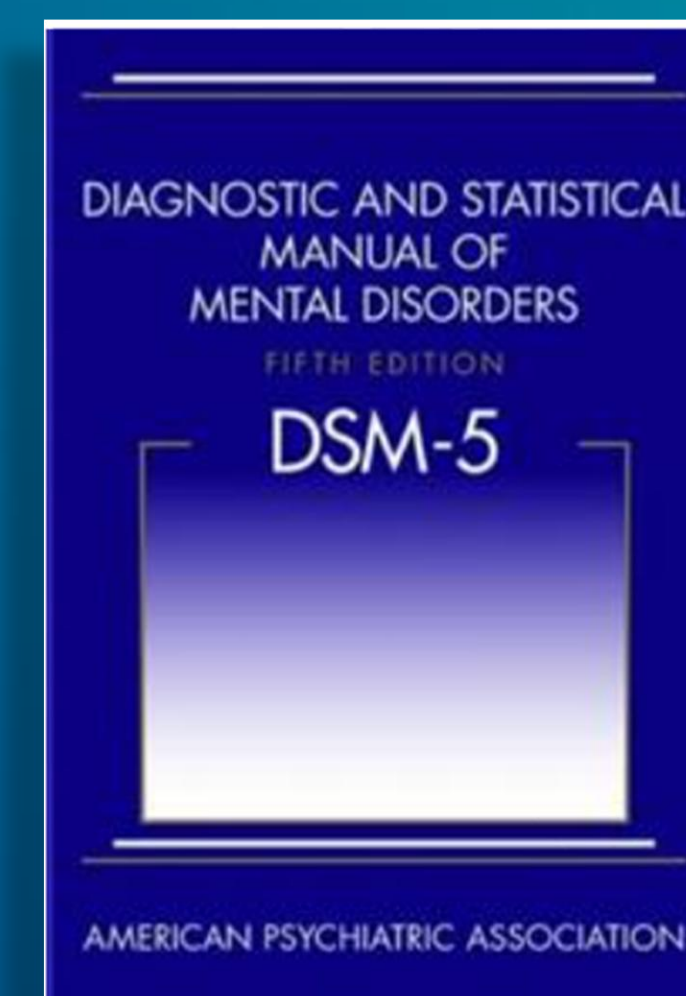


# MENTAL HEALTH: PERSPECTIVES

Screening for  
mental health  
symptoms



Diagnosis and treatment for a condition  
(e.g., major depressive disorder, anxiety  
disorder)  
542 categories and DSM-5-TR in 2022





# MENTAL HEALTH: PERSPECTIVES

## Person

Coping strategies?

Level of resilience?

Recovery and self-care?

## Social and life/sports situation

Stressors or adversities in life and sports?

Interpersonal violence?

Relationships? Social support?

Social health?

## Body

Symptoms – disease?

Symptoms – ill-health?

Health behaviours?



What is the problem?  
Values, needs,  
strengths?

How can we understand the symptoms?

Life history? Heredity? Onset?  
Development?

Trauma? Drug dependence?

Limitations to function well in life context?

Similar problems in other contexts?



# ELITE ATHLETE

**A PERSON WHO EXCELS IN SPORTS AND  
ATHLETICALLY PERFORMS AT A HIGH LEVEL**

**Personal stressors, life history, genetics etc...**

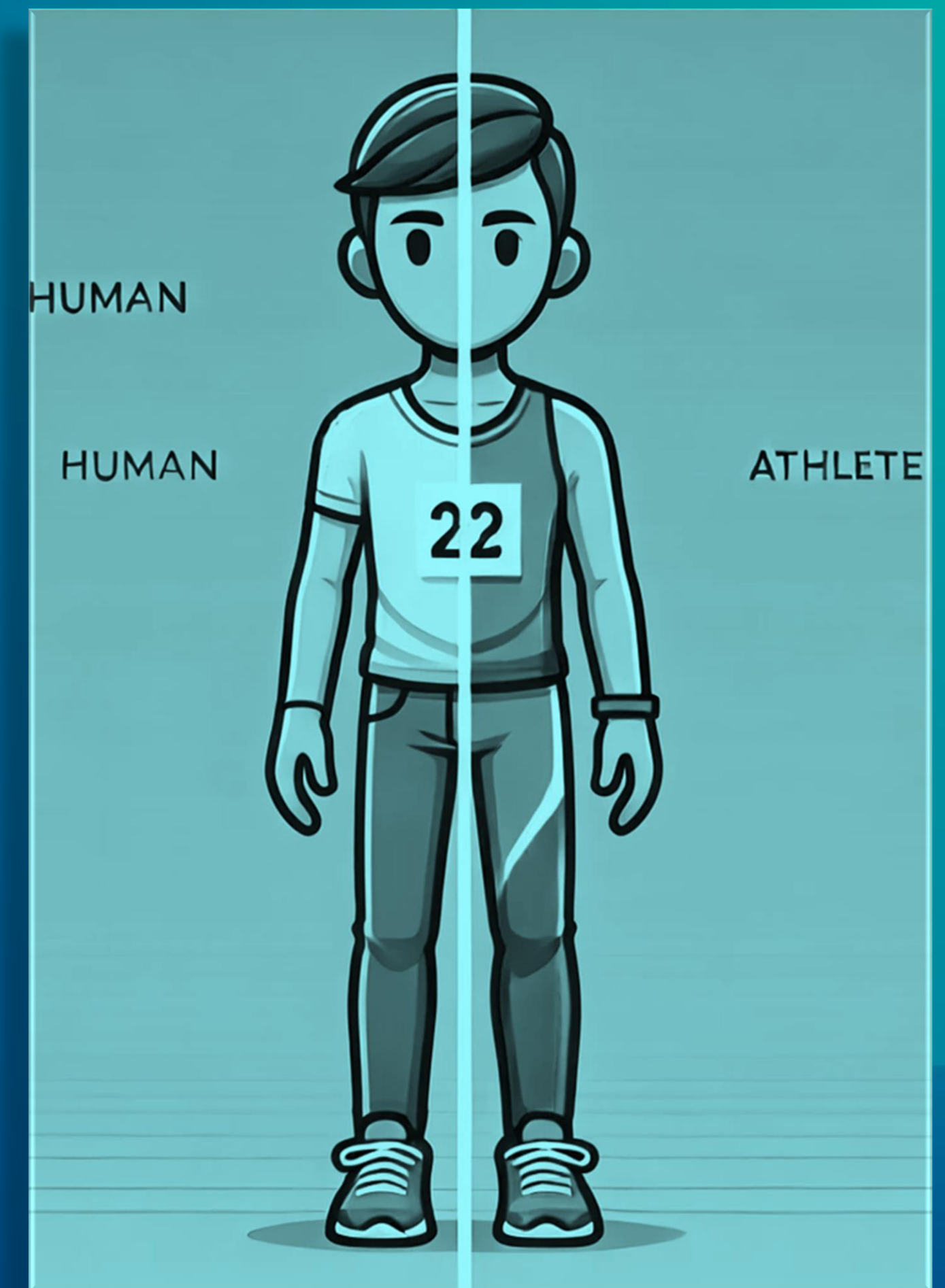
Heredity, personal vulnerabilities, trauma in life, childhood abuse, family situation, social situation, economy, relationships...

**Elite sports stressors**

Injuries, pressures, travels, strict lifestyle requirements, under-performance, deselection, rivalry, success, major competitions, expectations, career dissatisfaction, self-presentation issues, lack of possibilities to recover, commercialisation...

**Organisational stressors**

Leadership (e.g., destructive, abusive), team issues, entourage, sports cultural issues (e.g., win-at-all cost), environmental (e.g., facilities, equipment), financial support systems...





# PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS

Evidence-based and first-line psychological treatments\* are available for many mental health concerns frequently reported among elite athletes.

Context specific facilitators and barriers:

- + Adaptability and availability
- + Therapist's/instructor's professional skills, knowledge about treatments and capacity to connect with athletes ("common factors")
- + Coach and teammate support, goal consensus
- Busy schedules
- Complex intervention content

\* E.g., American Psychological Association (APA); Australian Psychological Society (APS); National institute for health and care excellence (NICE)

*Br J Sports Med* 2023;57:99–108. doi:10.1136/bjsports-2022-105596

## Effect of mindfulness-based programmes on elite athlete mental health: a systematic review and meta-analysis


Kearnan Myall <sup>1</sup>, Jesus Montero-Marín <sup>1,2</sup>, Paul Gorczynski,<sup>3</sup> Nabeela Kajee,<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Syed Sheriff,<sup>1,4</sup> Robert Bernard,<sup>5</sup> Eli Harriss,<sup>6</sup> Willem Kuyken<sup>1</sup>

Sports Medicine (2025) 55:877–897  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40279-024-02173-3>

### SYSTEMATIC REVIEW



## Psychological Interventions to Improve Elite Athlete Mental Wellbeing: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis

Wei Wang<sup>1,2</sup>  · Matthew J. Schweickle<sup>1,2</sup> · Emily R. Arnold<sup>1,2</sup> · Stewart A. Vella<sup>1,2</sup>

BMJ Open  
Sport &  
Exercise  
Medicine

## Swedish elite athletes' experiences of psychotherapy for mental health concerns provided by licensed psychologists and psychotherapists: a qualitative study

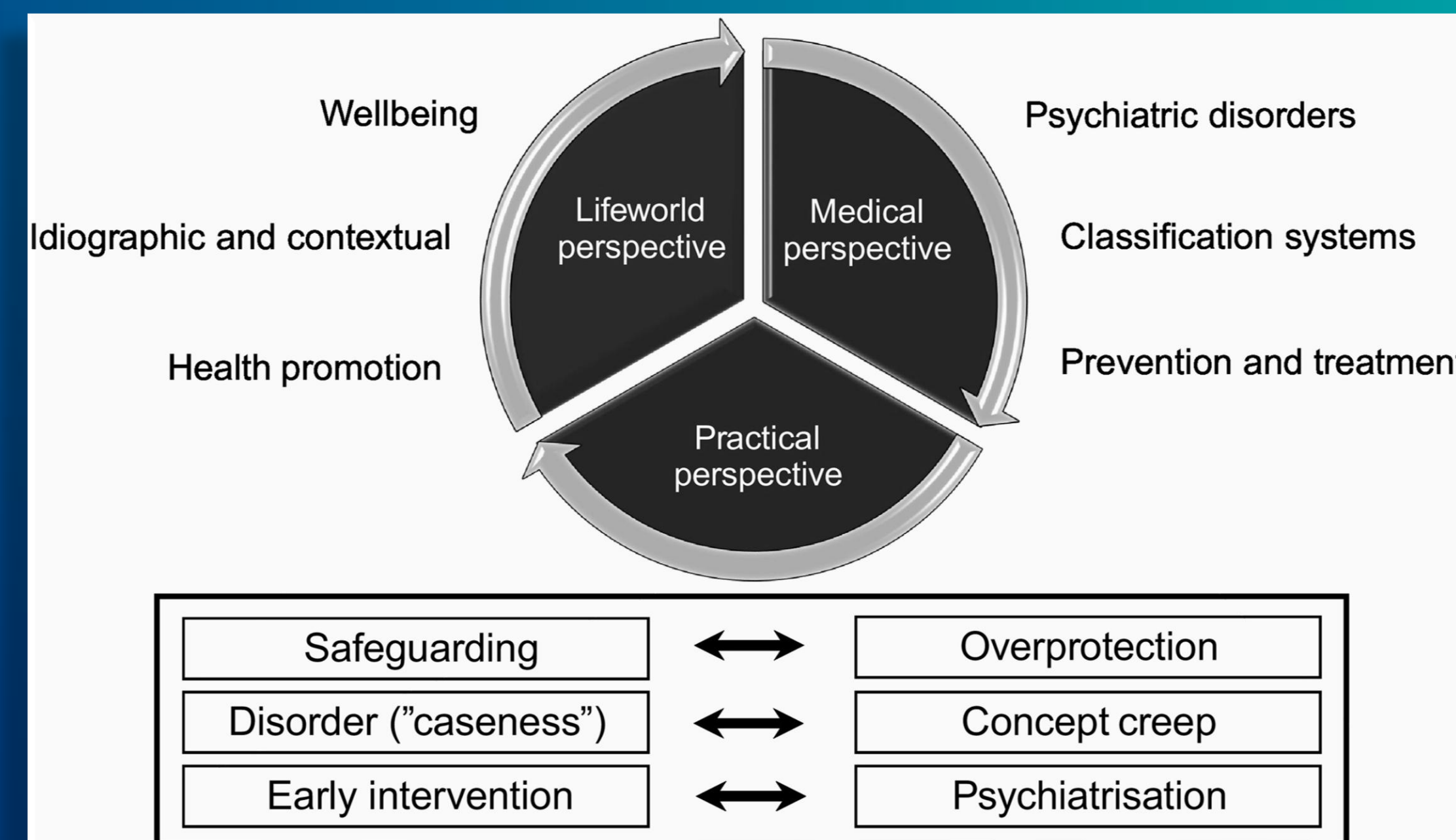
Carolina Lundqvist <sup>1,2</sup>, Jonas Wig,<sup>3</sup> David P Scharý<sup>4</sup>



# TALKING SENSIBLY ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH IN SPORTS

Given that high-performance sports are about pushing physical and psychological limits in pursuing excellence, aversive but normal thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are likely to be regularly present. High-performance athletes confront extraordinary circumstances

We need to be attentive to indications of mental health concerns that could be normalised in sport settings and neglected despite obvious prevention or treatment needs





# SOCIAL AND SPORTS CULTURAL FACTORS



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A focus on personal factors and mental disorders pose a risk of neglecting the broader contextual factors that can impact mental health or help-seeking behaviours





# SOCIAL AND SPORTS CULTURAL FACTORS



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“This is what it takes... Those who do not understand this have not grasped what elite sports is all about!”

Toxic cultures and interpersonal violence in sports





# TOXIC LEADERSHIP IN HIGH PERFORMANCE SPORTS

## AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND PERFORMANCE: A SCOPING REVIEW



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P - Problem	What is known about occurrence of “toxic leadership” in high-performance sports?
I - Intervention	How has “toxic leadership” been investigated in high-performance sports?
C - Context	In which high-performance sports contexts has “toxic leadership” been investigated?
O - outcome	What is known about consequences of “toxic leadership” at an individual and organisational level?

Databases

5

Abstract  
screening

657

Full-text review

83

Studies included

26



# TOXIC LEADERSHIP IN HIGH PERFORMANCE SPORTS



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## AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND PERFORMANCE: A SCOPING REVIEW

Antecedents of toxic leadership	Maintaining factors	Outcomes
Dark personality or behaviours	Power structures and dynamics in sports/organisations	Short-term and long-term negative impact on athlete mental health
Normalisation of destructive or extreme coaching behaviours	High status coaches with a significant influence over athletes' careers	Reduced motivation and dropout
Unrealistic performance expectations	Fears of repercussions, code of silence	Physical injuries
Lack of knowledge or alternative strategies	Performance-based value system, toxic leadership tolerated in pursuit of success	Increased risk of cheating, doping intentions
	Institutional practices: Conventions of holding practices behind closed doors	Organisational disarray; Negative mental health and turnover among sports personell
		Survival and career gains for the leader(s) in the prevailling sport system
		Assumptions about – but no empirical data to support - being 'character-building'



# SPORTS CULTURE

## WHAT ARE THE NEEDS FOR SUSTAINABLE ELITE SPORTS?

Mental health promotion, prevention and treatment when needed are all important

Commercial pressures, tight competition schedules with inadequate recovery, toxic leadership, interpersonal violence, sports cultural or organizational factors all contribute to increased risks of mental health issues

Mental health symptoms should not be individualised as psychiatric diagnoses if the psychological reactions are healthy responses social and structural problems in the athlete's environment or in the sports culture overall



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# SUMMARY

Athletes, coaches, support staff, and others involved in high-performance sports are humans – not superhumans

Multiple professions and disciplines target mental health. Interdisciplinary collaboration and support

Mental health promotion and early interventions essential to strengthen psychosocial resources, skills and resiliency

Mental health is not just an individual issue. The elite sports culture and outdated assumptions about 'what is needed' should be challenged

Sustainable elite sports and mental health encompass all persons and levels within the ecological sports system



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# A FINAL MESSAGE

“But also do things that you think are fun. Those things that made you start with sports from the very beginning. Go back to playfulness. It does not matter if you are 25 or 15 years old. I think many [elite athletes] lose their playfulness”

- Swedish elite athlete, medalist at multiple Olympic Games

Lundqvist & Kristiansen, 2022



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# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

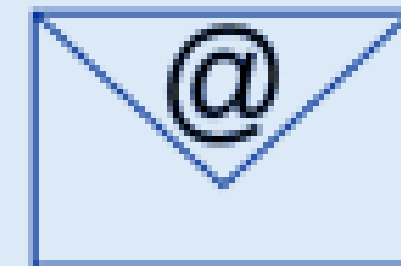
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