



## Teaching Awareness of Ethical Governance in Sport

Topic: 6

### Issues of Athlete Mental Health

#### Overview:

Mental health is important at every stage of life and includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Mental health must be considered along with mental illness, because these are as prevalent among athletes as in the general population.

Athletes, coaches and support staff often have a poor understanding of mental health and usually are not trained enough to recognize, understand and manage mental health problems.

Promoting mental health within sport is essential for athletes in their careers and post-sport lives, as well as for practitioners, coaches, welfare officers, performance and support staff, and managers.

Over the last few years more athletes have started to recognize mental health problems, and there is a drive to confront the stigma connected with mental health issues. Athletes are arguably under increased mental health pressures as there is an expectation to be 'mentally tough' and show strength and resilience. This can reduce the likelihood of athletes seeking support for mental health issues and can manifest itself in other ways, e.g. eating disorders, drinking and violence.

Specific topics include: eating disorders, athlete' anorexia, exercise addiction/ exercise dependency, pugilistic dementia/chronic traumatic encephalopathy, depression, panic disorders, risk factors, behaviour and cognitive alteration, stigma, prevention measure.

#### Aim:

The aim is to outline the issues associated with mental health disorders in the context of pressures to perform and win and the culture of 'superman' which can inhibit student-athletes from seeking help.



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### Objectives:

By the end of this lectures and independent study tasks, students will be able:

- to have a basic understanding of mental health and mental disorders by all participants in sports and recreation, officials, recreation staff members
- to understand the most recent evidence and expert recommendations regarding diagnosis and management of sports-related mental health disorders
- to increase the capacity of those involved in sports to cope with mental health problems
- to understand the risk and protective factors related to mental health in the sports-environment.

### Case Study Compendium:

- [Case 4]
- [Case 16]

### Activities

- Give out extracts from McMahon et al. (2017) Slim to Win and ask students to identify and discuss the issues it raises
- Discuss the concept of mental health – provide the WHO (2014) definition
- Discuss the Bauman (2016) and Caddick and Ryall (2012) papers on mental toughness – is the focus on mental toughness a hindrance to mental health?
- Ask students to provide some recommendations for sports organisations to improve mental health for athletes
- Compare these against the Henriksen et al (2019) consensus statement

### Readings and Resources

- Bauman, N.J. (2016) The Stigma of Mental Health in Athletes: are mental toughness and mental health seen as contradictory in elite sport? *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 50: 135-136. DOI: 10.1136/bjsports-2015-095570
- Caddick, N. and Ryall, E. (2012): The Social Construction of 'Mental Toughness' – a Fascistoid Ideology?, *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 39:1, 137-154, DOI:10.1080/00948705.2012.675068
- Henriksen, K., Schinke, R., Moesch, M., McCann, S., Parham, W.D., Larsen, C.H. & Terry, P. (2019): Consensus statement on improving the mental health of high performance athletes, *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, DOI: 10.1080/1612197X.2019.1570473
- McMahon, J., McGannon, K. R. & Zehntner, C. (2017) Slim to Win: An Ethnodrama of Three Elite Swimmers' 'Presentation of Self' in Relation to a Dominant Cultural Ideology, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 34, 108-123, DOI: 10.1123/ssj.2015-0166



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