



BACKGROUND: Sports psychology is the scientific study of the psychological factors that are associated with participation and performance in sports activities. Sport psychologists' interests are in helping athletes use psychological principles to achieve optimal mental health and to improve performance. They also help athletes understand how participation in sport, exercise and physical activity affects an individual's psychological development, health and well-being. The study and application of psychological principles of human performance in helping athletes consistently perform in the upper range of their capabilities is known as applied sport psychology. Applied sport psychologists are trained and specialized to engage in a broad range of activities including the identification, development, and execution of the mental and emotional knowledge. (Source: <https://www.apadivisions.org/division-47/about/resources/what-is>)

HOW SPORT PSYCHOLOGISTS HELP: Sport psychologists help athletes overcome problems and achieve their goals. Athletes might become anxious or lose focus during competition, have trouble communicating with teammates, controlling their temper, or even just motivating themselves to exercise. Sports psychologists can help enhance their performance with various mental strategies, such as visualization, self-talk and relaxation techniques. They help athletes deal with pressure from parents, coaches, or even their own expectations. After an injury, they may need help in recovering and tolerating pain, adhering to their physical therapy regimens, or adjusting to being sidelined. Even those who want to exercise regularly may find themselves unable to fulfill their goal. Sport psychologists can help increase their motivation and tackle any related concerns. Sports psychology can help people off the playing field as well with some of the same strategies as relaxation techniques, mental rehearsals and cognitive restructuring, which are useful in the workplace and other settings. (Source: <https://www.apa.org/topics/sport-rehabilitation/psychologists>)

THE ELITE ATHLETE: Studies suggest that elite athletes are at a comparable risk of developing a mental illness. Many of these athletes suffer from over-training, which coincides with symptoms of depression, and some illnesses seem to be associated with certain sports. For example, women in distance running, gymnastics, and other "leanness sports" have a high risk of meeting the criteria for an eating disorder. Athletes with multiple concussions could be up to three times more likely to be diagnosed with depression. These risks should be considered when recommending treatment or treating high-level athletes. Many high-profile athletes are helping to reframe how players and people in general think about mental health. To combat this stigma in sports, athletic trainers, coaches, and teams need to be educated about how to appropriately support athletes struggling with mental health problems. Research has found that those who attended a 4-hour applied workshop reported increased depression literacy, anxiety literacy, and confidence in their ability to address the mental health needs of their athletes. (Source: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mind-matters-menninger/202007/how-destigmatize-mental-health-treatment-in-sports>)

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