

Commentary on the Article “Anxiety and Generalized Anxiety Disorder in Elite Athletes”

Comentário ao Artigo “Ansiedade e Transtorno de Ansiedade Generalizada em Atletas de Elite”

Keywords: Anxiety; Anxiety Disorders; Athletes; Sports

Palavras-chave: Ansiedade; Atletas; Desporto; Perturbação de Ansiedade

Dear Editor,

We commend the authors on their article “Anxiety and Generalized Anxiety Disorder in Elite Athletes”, published in *Acta Médica Portuguesa*.¹ Given the growing concerns surrounding the mental health of high-performance athletes, this study makes a valuable contribution to understanding the psychological challenges within this domain. However, we would like to offer some constructive reflections that may enhance future research on this topic.

The chosen methodology, a narrative review, facilitates a broad synthesis of the literature but presents inherent limitations. The lack of systematic criteria for study selection and evaluation may affect the objectivity of the conclusions. A systematic review or meta-analysis could enhance methodological rigor, offering a more robust and comparative perspective on the prevalence of generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) in elite athletes.

Another key consideration is the definition of an ‘elite athlete’. The criterion adopted – the participation in national or international competitions – is broad, encompassing athletes with varying levels of preparation and exposure to competitive stress. Given that different sports impose distinct psychological demands, a more precise classification could help identify specific risk factors. Swann *et al* introduced a four-tier athlete classification – semi-elite, competitive-elite, successful-elite, and world-class elite – evaluating athletes based on performance, success, experience, and the competitiveness of their sport both nationally and globally.²

Regarding the comparison between GAD prevalence in athletes and the general population, the study concludes that no significant differences exist. However, methodological inconsistencies among the reviewed studies may influence this conclusion. Self-assessment questionnaires tend to overestimate the prevalence rate of psychiatric disorders, whereas clinical interviews provide greater specificity. Discussing these methodological discrepancies would enhance data interpretation and prevent premature generalizations.

REFERENCES

1. Pires L, Gomes S, Freitas P. Ansiedade e perturbação de ansiedade generalizada em atletas de elite. *Acta Med Port*. 2024;37:858-64.
2. Swann C, Moran A, Piggott D. Defining elite athletes: Issues in the study of expert performance in sport psychology. *Psychol Sport Exercise*. 2014;16:3-14.
3. Palazzolo J. Anxiety and performance. *Encephale*. 2020;46:158-61.

Additionally, while the article provides valuable insights into risk and protective factors for anxiety in elite athletes, further exploration of sociocultural and economic influences would be beneficial. Anxiety perception and access to psychological support vary across countries and sports disciplines, directly affecting therapeutic and preventive strategies. A more detailed analysis of these aspects would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.³

The discussion on therapeutic strategies effectively highlights the roles of psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy in treating GAD in athletes. However, further exploration of complementary approaches – such as mindfulness, bio-feedback, and emotional education programs – would be valuable, as these have shown promise in anxiety management within high-performance sports. Additionally, a greater emphasis on preventive strategies would strengthen the study’s impact, given the significant role anxiety plays in both performance and career longevity.⁴

Finally, the study rightly emphasizes the need for more epidemiological research on the relationship between anxiety and elite sports. Future studies would benefit from larger, more representative samples, as well as longitudinal methodologies to assess how anxiety evolves throughout an athlete’s career and its relationship with different stages of athletic life.

In light of these observations, we reaffirm the importance of this study in advancing knowledge in sports psychiatry and the mental health of high-performance athletes. We hope these suggestions may contribute to refine future research in this field.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

MA: Writing and critical review of the manuscript.

EMF: Critical review of the manuscript.

All authors approved the final version to be published.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

FUNDING SOURCES

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

4. Chang C, Putukian M, Aerni G, Diamond A, Hong G, Ingram Y, et al. Mental health issues and psychological factors in athletes: detection, management, effect on performance and prevention: American Medical Society for Sports Medicine Position Statement—executive summary. *Br J Sports Med*. 2020;54:216-20.

Marcelo ANDRADE SILAMI✉¹, Elisa MELO FERREIRA¹

¹. Unidade de Saúde Familiar Luísa Todi. Unidade Local de Saúde da Arrábida. Setúbal. Portugal.

✉ **Autor correspondente:** Marcelo Andrade Silami. msilami@hotmail.com

Recebido/Received: 02/04/2025 - **Aceite/Accepted:** 06/05/2025 - **Publicado Online/Published Online:** 09/06/2025 - **Publicado/Published:** 01/08/2025

Copyright © Ordem dos Médicos 2025

<https://doi.org/10.20344/amp.23189>

