

Mental Health in Elite Sports: Setting the Scene

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Sport is generally beneficial for short- and long-term physical and mental health. However, the increasing number of anecdotal reports in the media made by either active or retired athletes, combined with the recent scientific literature, suggests that mental health symptoms and disorders are common among elite athletes. The prevalence of mental health symptoms in active elite athletes reaches up to 39% for distress and anxiety/depression (not differentiated), 29% for sleep disturbance, and 27% for disordered eating. In former elite athletes, the prevalence of mental health symptoms is also substantial, ranging from 15% for distress and 29% for sleep disturbance to 69% for alcohol misuse. These mental health symptoms may be induced by sport-related or general stressors (e.g., injury, illness, adverse life events) and have the potential to impair the athletes' health, performance and quality of life. Recent findings suggest that mental health symptoms might also be prevalent among members of the athletes' entourage (e.g., medical team members, coaches) given the various performance, organisational (e.g., team management) and personal stressors to which they may be exposed to. Clinicians working within the context of elite sports should remain knowledgeable and skilled in order to protect and promote both the short- and long-term mental health of elite athletes. Therefore, they can rely among others on the information embedded within the first consensus statement on mental health in elite athletes published by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in June 2019. A brief overview of all activities following such a key publication will enable to set the scene for this first Protecting Mental Health in Sport + Exercise (PROMISE) conference.