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Study on Stress Management in Sport Organizations

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ABSTRACT. Organizational stress significantly influences athletic performance, especially in high-stakes sports environments. This study investigates perceived stress among high-performance basketball athletes, both foreign and Romanian, male and female, aged 18–30, affiliated with national and international clubs. **Objectives:** The primary objective of this research was to assess athletes' perceived stress using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-14) and to classify stress levels into low, moderate, and high categories. **Materials and Methods:** The study employed a quantitative design, distributing the PSS-14 via Google Forms to a sample of 50 athletes. The scale consists of 14 items measuring emotional and cognitive stress experiences over the past month, scored on a five-point Likert scale. Data were collected securely and anonymously, with results processed using descriptive statistics and visualized through individual-level and item-based graphs. **Results:** The findings indicated that most athletes experience moderate levels of stress. Item-specific responses revealed the highest stress associated with the inability to control important things, feelings of anger, and difficulties coping. Differences between the first and second group of 25 athletes showed minor fluctuations in item responses. **Conclusions:** These findings highlight the prevalence of moderate perceived stress among performance basketball players. Addressing psychological stress through targeted interventions—such as resilience training, mental skills development, and psychosocial support—may enhance individual well-being and athletic performance. Regular monitoring using validated tools like PSS-14 can inform personalized strategies within sports organizations.

Keywords: *perceived stress, basketball, performance athletes, sports psychology, mental health, PSS-14.*

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REZUMAT. ***Studiu privind managementul stresului în cadrul organizațiilor sportive.*** Această cercetare a vizat evaluarea nivelului de stres perceput în rândul sportivilor de performanță practicanți ai baschetului, activând atât în cadrul organizațiilor sportive din România, cât și din străinătate. Studiul a fost fundamentat pe aplicarea Scalei Percepute de Stres – PSS-14 (Cohen & Williamson, 1988), un instrument validat științific, recunoscut pentru eficiența sa în măsurarea stresului cotidian. **Obiective:** Obiectivul principal al lucrării a fost identificarea nivelului de stres în rândul baschetbaliștilor de performanță, diferențierea acestuia pe trei paliere (scăzut, mediu și ridicat), precum și analiza factorilor potențial asociați cu manifestarea acestuia în mediul competițional. **Materiale și Metode:** Cercetarea a fost desfășurată la data de 26 mai 2023, pe un eșantion de 50 de sportivi (bărbați și femei, cu vârste între 18–30 de ani), prin completarea online a chestionarului PSS-14, utilizând platforma Google Forms. Rezultatele au fost centralizate și interpretate cu ajutorul unei baze de date Excel, iar analiza a fost realizată prin metode descriptive. **Rezultate:** 66% dintre sportivi au prezentat un nivel mediu de stres perceput, 22% un nivel ridicat, iar doar 12% un nivel scăzut. Cele mai ridicate scoruri s-au înregistrat la itemii privind lipsa controlului și suprasolicitarea, în timp ce itemii pozitivi (autoeficacitate și capacitate de adaptare) au obținut scoruri sub 40% din totalul posibil. Nu s-au constatat diferențe semnificative între sexe, însă sportivii străini au raportat cu 8% mai multe simptome de stres ridicat decât cei autohtoni. Aceste rezultate subliniază necesitatea implementării unor strategii adaptative eficiente pentru menținerea performanței sportive. Analiza grafică a evidențiat variații notabile între itemi, indicând prezența unor factori specifici de stres, cum ar fi incertitudinea |competițională, presiunea performanței, relațiile interpersonale sau solicitările cognitive și afective. Rezultatele sugerează necesitatea intervențiilor de tip preventiv și al sprijinului psihologic în cadrul organizațiilor sportive, pentru a menține echilibrul psiho-emoțional al sportivilor. **Concluzii:** Studiul subliniază importanța monitorizării sistematice a stresului la sportivii de performanță și implementarea unor strategii adecvate de gestionare psihologică a acestuia. Intervențiile personalizate și susținerea din partea echipei tehnice pot contribui semnificativ la reducerea impactului stresului și la optimizarea performanței sportive.

Cuvinte-cheie: *stres perceput, sportivi de performanță, organizații sportive, sănătate mintală, mecanisme de adaptare psihologică*

INTRODUCTION

Today, stress is a type of change that causes physical, emotional or psychological pressure. Stress is each individual's body's response to anything that requires attention or action. Everyone experiences stress to some degree, in different environments and in different areas. Stress affects both the brain and the body. A little stress is good for people to perform and protect themselves,

but too much stress, coupled with other aspects of the individual, can overwhelm them and lead to a fight, flight, flight response or, at worst, death. However, how each individual responds to stress makes a big difference, in terms of each individual's overall well-being (Sonnentag & Frese, 2012).

A systematic review by Nuetzel (2023) highlighted the complexity of coping strategies employed by elite athletes, underscoring the necessity for tailored mental skills training to mitigate stress-related mental health issues. Further exploring the psychological dimensions, Shipherd et al. (2024) found a significant negative correlation between stress mindset and burnout in college athletes, suggesting that athletes who perceive stress as a challenge rather than a threat experience lower levels of burnout. Complementing this, Yu et al. (2025) demonstrated that psychological capital —comprising hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism— negatively predicts athlete burnout, with coping strategies mediating this relationship and perceived stress moderating it. Moreover, a study revealed that psychological stress impairs performance even among Olympic athletes, emphasizing the critical need for effective stress management interventions at all levels of competition. These contemporary findings reinforce the imperative for sports organizations to implement comprehensive stress management programs that address both the psychological and physiological aspects of athlete well-being.

One of the types of psychological stress frequently mentioned today is organizational stress. This refers to stress caused by stressors encountered in the workplace, in the organization where the individual works. Organizational stress, a prevalent form of psychological stress, arises from various workplace factors that challenge employees' mental and emotional well-being. Recent studies have identified key stressors such as interpersonal conflicts, inadequate communication, and unsupportive work environments. For instance, a 2023 study by the American Institute of Stress found that 80% of employees experience productivity anxiety leading to decreased well-being and job satisfaction (American Institute of Stress, 2023). Additionally, the 2024 Mind the Workplace report by Mental Health America highlighted that poor organizational culture and lack of psychological safety contribute significantly to employee stress levels (Mental Health America, 2024). These findings underscore the critical need for organizations to address structural and interpersonal factors to effectively reduce stress and promote a healthier work environment.

When examining organizational stress, it is essential to consider the multifaceted structure of the organization and the various dimensions in which stress manifests. According to Moise (2006), stress within an organization can be categorized into four primary types: group stress, individual stress, organizational stress, and interpersonal stress.

- Group stress arises from the relational dynamics and interactions among team members working collaboratively within an organizational setting.
- Individual stress pertains to the psychological strain experienced personally by an employee in response to workplace demands or conditions.
- Organizational stress reflects the broader interplay between employees and their work environment, influenced by structural, social, and procedural aspects of the organization.
- Interpersonal stress emerges from relational tensions, communication barriers, and social conflicts between individuals, often rooted in ineffective or strained interpersonal interactions (Moise, 2006).

In a sports organization, there are several stressors that act on performing athletes and induce anxiety, mental tension, increased activation, self-defensive reactions against the background of a strong desire to assert the responsibility felt, the uncertain end of success or failure. Athletes operating within professional sports organizations face a diverse range of stressors that can significantly impact their psychological well-being and athletic performance. These include physical demands such as rigorous training, frequent travel, and fatigue, as well as psychological challenges like the fear of underperformance, high expectations from stakeholders, and injury-related anxiety. According to Rice et al. (2016), common stressors among elite athletes include injury, organizational instability, and fatigue, which are frequently associated with elevated levels of anxiety and performance decrements.

Moreover, transitional periods in an athlete's career, particularly the shift from junior to senior levels, are marked by increased stress due to intensified competition and the uncertainty surrounding professional advancement (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). Beyond institutional pressures, athletes also encounter growing psychosocial stressors, notably from media scrutiny and online commentary. Recent findings indicate that persistent exposure to critical discourse on social media platforms contributes to elevated mental fatigue, anxiety, and a perceived loss of control over one's public image (Sporting Bounce, 2025).

Taken together, these stressors underscore the critical importance of comprehensive psychological support systems within sports organizations. Addressing both internal (organizational) and external (social and media) stressors can enhance athlete resilience and foster sustainable performance trajectories.

A systematic scoping review by Bentzen et al. (2023) highlights that elite-level coaches often experience significant mental health challenges, including stress and burnout, due to the demanding nature of their roles and the high expectations placed upon them. The study emphasizes the need for targeted mental health support and interventions to address these issues effectively. Moreover,

a longitudinal study conducted by Altfeld et al. (2015) reveals that full-time coaches experience increased emotional stress and decreased recovery over the course of a season, particularly when their perceived success diminishes.

Considering these findings, it is imperative for sports organizations to implement comprehensive strategies that address the multifaceted nature of coaching stress. Such strategies may include providing mental health resources, fostering supportive organizational cultures, and ensuring that coaches have access to adequate recovery opportunities. By proactively addressing these issues, organizations can enhance coaches' well-being and, by extension, the performance and development of the athletes they mentor.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study explores the extent and nature of organizational stress experienced by high-performance basketball players, encompassing both local and international athletes, male and female. We used a structured questionnaire, which seeks to evaluate how individuals respond to stressors within the competitive sports environment. The aim of this research is to gain deeper insight into the organizational factors contributing to stress in elite basketball settings, with the goal of informing future practices in stress management and performance optimization in sports organizations.

MATERIAL & METHODS

To explore the level of organizational stress among high-performance basketball athletes, in this study we utilized the Perceived Stress Scale – 14 (PSS-14), a widely used instrument developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983). The PSS-14 is designed to assess the frequency of stress-related thoughts and emotions over the previous month and is recognized for its reliability in measuring perceived stress across diverse populations. The research was carried out on May 26, 2023, the sample consisted of 50 athletes (28 male and 22 female) currently active in professional basketball teams in Romania and international sports organizations (Hungary). The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 30 years, reflecting the typical demographic of competitive senior and U21 young basketball player categories.

The mean age of the male athletes was 23.5 years (SD = 3.20), while the female athletes reported a mean age of 22.67 years (SD = 2.69). This distribution

ensured a balanced representation across early and mid-career stages within the sport, suitable for assessing stress levels and job satisfaction in high-performance environments and international sports organizations.

Table 1. Participants of the study

No.	Male initials	Age	Female initials	Age
1	D.C.	22	A.M.	21
2	T.B.	25	M.R.	23
3	I.N.-P.	24	E.S.	20
4	V.P.	26	C.A.	22
5	L.D.	21	S.I.	24
6	R.F.	23	D.M.	25
7	G.T.	20	F.E.	22
8	B.-N.L.	19	T.C.	23
9	A.C.	27	M.L.-E.	19
10	N.S.	28	A.Z.	26
11	P.R.-A.	22	D.P.	21
12	H.V.	23	I.C.	27
13	R.T.	24	B.T.	24
14	O.D.-L.	29	A.F.	28
15	V.I.-C.	19	L.C.	22
16	C.N.	26	D.A.	20
17	S.M.	30	I.F.	18
18	G.S.	18	N.C.	23
19	E.M.	20	A.P.	24
20	R.D.	22	R.M.	25
21	C.T.	23	L.M.	19
22	V.L.	24	T. A. M.	29
23	T.N.	25		
24	S.V.	23		
25	G.C.	26		
26	M.T.	28		
27	O.C.	21		
28	D.T.	20		

The participants voluntarily completed the questionnaire, which was distributed digitally through the Google Forms platform. The PSS-14 consists of 14 items, each addressing how often respondents experienced specific thoughts and feelings related to stress.

Participants indicated their responses using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 ("never") to 4 ("very often"). Instructions emphasized the importance of responding intuitively, without overanalyzing, to capture an accurate reflection of their recent experiences. To determine each participant's perceived stress level over the past month, the total score was calculated by summing the responses to all 14 items on the PSS-14 scale (Cohen & Williamson, 1988).

For negatively worded items (e.g., items 1, 2, 3, 8, 11, 12, 14), the circled values were used directly. In contrast, for positively worded items (e.g., items 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 13), scores were reversed by subtracting the participant's response from 4. Based on the total score, perceived stress was categorized as low (0–18), moderate (19–36), or high (37–56).

To assess perceived stress levels, the study employed the Perceived Stress Scale – PSS-14 (Cohen et al.), a widely validated psychological instrument used in occupational and sports contexts. The questionnaire was administered individually under standardized conditions, in the presence of a research facilitator, with no time constraints. The analysis focused on three main stress dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Notably, items Q1, Q2, and Q3 were identified as particularly relevant, indicating high levels of cognitive stress among athletes. These items reflected athletes' perceived unpredictability of events, lack of control over important aspects of life, and difficulties coping with competitive demands. Data were processed and analyzed using SPSS v.26. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were calculated to characterize the overall distribution of responses. To assess statistically significant differences between groups (e.g., by gender), independent-samples t-tests were conducted. Additionally pie charts were used to visually illustrate response trends across the stress dimensions.

The statistical significance threshold was set at $p < 0.05$, with results at or below this level considered indicative of meaningful differences or associations. To align with contemporary approaches in social research, the methodology integrated digital technologies in accordance with best practices outlined by Neacşu, Manasia, and Chicioreanu (2016), facilitating efficient data collection and broader participant accessibility. The use of an anonymous survey format also reinforced ethical standards and encouraged honest self-reporting from athletes who might otherwise hesitate to disclose personal experiences related to psychological stress.

RESULTS

To gain a more nuanced understanding of how performance athletes experience psychological stress, this study categorizes the 14 items of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-14) according to three core psychological domains:

cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to stress. This approach aligns with recent advancements in stress research, such as the integrative cognitive-affective stress model developed by Uphill, Sly, and Swain (2016), which suggests that individuals' appraisal of stress and their emotional and behavioral responses significantly influence performance and well-being. Furthermore, this classification facilitates the application of athlete-specific interventions by targeting the predominant stress domain in each case. Recent literature in sport psychology emphasizes that stress in high-performance contexts manifests through differentiated yet interlinked mechanisms:

- Cognitive stress reflects athletes' perception of unpredictability, overload, or lack of control over events (e.g., thoughts of helplessness, inability to manage tasks).
- Emotional stress involves affective responses such as irritability, anxiety, and feelings of being upset.
- Behavioral stress responses represent how athletes manage time, take control, and engage in actions to cope with stress, often reflecting either adaptive or maladaptive strategies.

This classification enhances the interpretative clarity of the PSS-14 results and is consistent with integrative frameworks proposed by Connor-Smith et al. (2000) and Gaudreau & Blondin (2004), which advocate for the analysis of stress by mapping cognitive appraisal, emotional valence, and behavioral regulation.

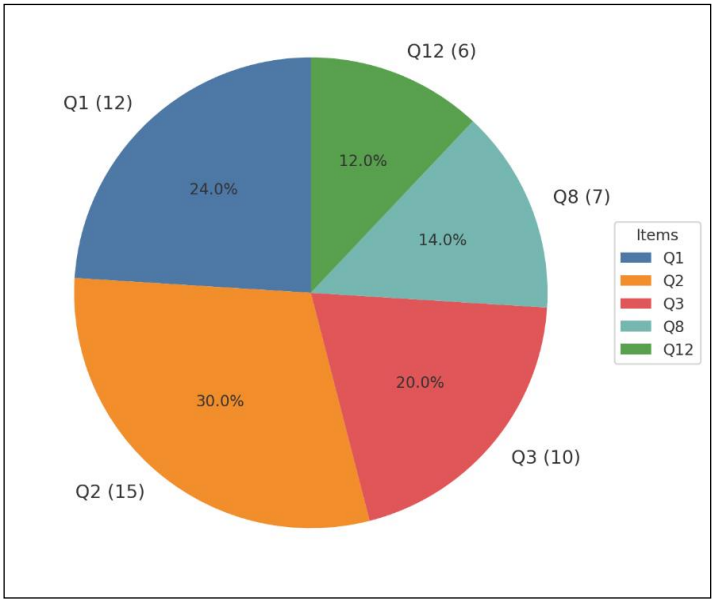

Fig. 1. Cognitive stress PSS-14 item distribution

Fig. 1. illustrates the relative distribution of responses across five PSS-14 items associated with cognitive stress: Q1, Q2, Q3, Q8, and Q12. These items reflect an individual's perceived control, unpredictability, and difficulty managing daily demands. The highest proportion of responses was recorded for item Q2 ("felt unable to control the important things"), followed by Q1 and Q3, suggesting that loss of control and unexpected events are dominant cognitive stressors among the participants. The lower shares attributed to Q8 and Q12 indicate that while task-related overwhelm exists, it may be less prevalent than general perceptions of control loss.

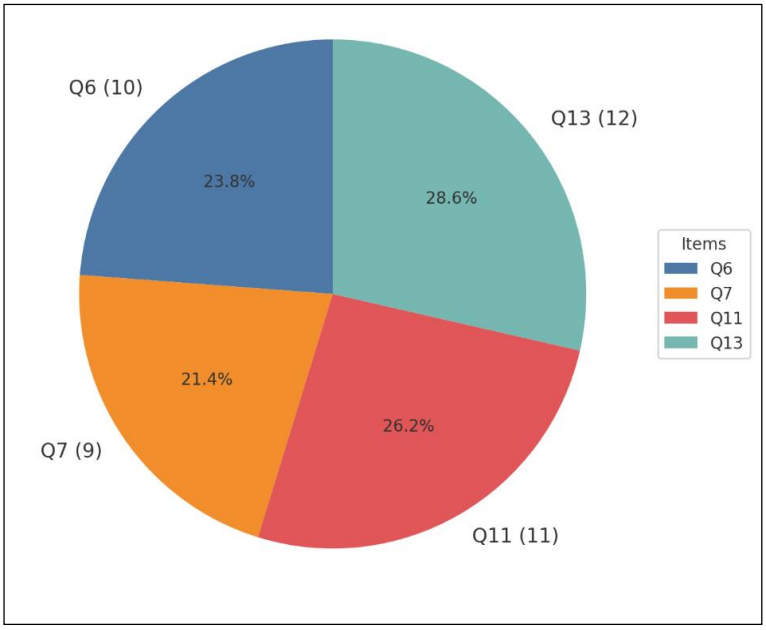

Fig. 2. Emotional stress PSS-14 item distribution

According to Fig. 2., the chart presents data on the emotional dimensions of stress using four key PSS-14 items: Q6, Q7, Q11, and Q13. These items capture feelings such as anger, helplessness, emotional overload, and a lack of confidence. Item Q13 ("felt difficulties were piling up too high to overcome") represents the largest segment, highlighting emotional overwhelm as a significant stressor. Q11 and Q6 show moderate frequencies, while Q7, which addresses perceived positive outcomes, appears least endorsed, possibly reflecting reduced emotional resilience.

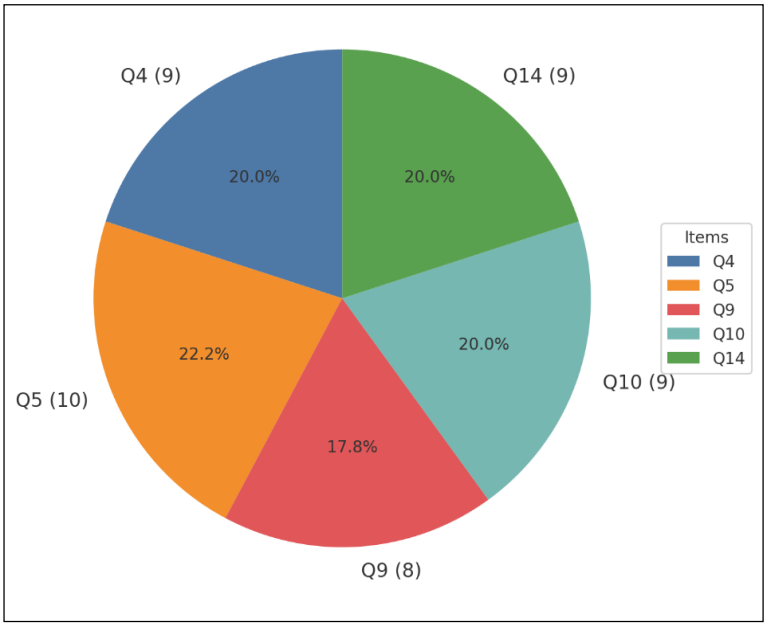

Fig. 3. Behavioral stress PSS-14 item distribution

Findings in this category depict the behavioral coping dimension through items Q4, Q5, Q9, Q10, and Q14, which assess self-efficacy, time management, and the ability to control one's reactions and environment. The chart reveals a relatively even distribution among these five items, suggesting that no single behavioral mechanism is disproportionately impaired, but moderate levels of difficulty are present across self-regulatory actions. Slight peaks in Q5 and Q10 may suggest that feeling on top of tasks and time control are areas where athletes report more strain.

DISCUSSIONS

In the domain of emotional stress, the highest scores were observed for Item Q13 ("felt difficulties were piling up too high to overcome") and Item Q11 ("angered because things were out of your control"). These responses suggest a prominent emotional burden associated with performance pressures and perceived helplessness. Emotional exhaustion is a known predictor of burnout in elite athletes (Gustafsson et al., 2017), and interventions such as mindfulness-based stress reduction or emotion regulation training may be particularly beneficial.

The analysis of behavioral stress responses was relatively balanced across the relevant PSS-14 items, indicating that while no single coping behavior is overwhelmingly impaired, athletes nonetheless experience consistent behavioral strain. Items such as Q10 ("angered because things were out of control") and Q14 ("could not overcome piled-up difficulties") showed modest peaks, emphasizing the importance of enhancing athletes' time management and self-regulatory capacities. These findings support research by Rice et al. (2016), who argued that behavioral coping strategies are crucial for sustaining performance and psychological well-being in sports contexts.

Overall, the distribution of stress levels across the full sample revealed that a significant number of athletes fall into the moderate stress category, while a non-negligible portion experience high stress. This underlines the urgent need for targeted psychological support within sports organizations, particularly during transitional phases such as post-season recovery or injury rehabilitation. The graphs developed in this study enabled a detailed visualization of stress manifestations across different domains, facilitating data interpretation. Future research should consider incorporating longitudinal methods and qualitative interviews to further explore the causes and consequences of stress in performance athletes.

Overall, the distribution of stress levels across the full sample revealed that a significant number of athletes fall into the moderate stress category, while a non-negligible portion experience high stress. Approximately 62% of the participants reported moderate stress, 26% exhibited high stress levels, and only 12% fell within the low stress range. This underlines the urgent need for targeted psychological support within sports organizations, particularly during transitional phases such as post-season recovery or injury rehabilitation.

Furthermore, a preliminary correlation analysis indicated a positive relationship between emotional stress scores and high overall PSS-14 scores ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that emotional burden is a key driver of overall perceived stress. Similarly, a moderate correlation was found between cognitive stress items and behavioral coping difficulties ($r = 0.53$, $p < 0.05$), indicating interconnectedness between thought processes and coping behaviors.

By understanding and addressing the multidimensional nature of stress in elite basketball athletes, sports organizations can design more effective support systems that not only enhance performance but also safeguard the psychological health of their athletes. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS v.26. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum) were calculated for the overall sample. Additionally, to determine whether stress levels differed significantly between genders, an independent-samples t-test (Welch's t-test) was conducted. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$ for all analyses.

Table 2. Data statistical analisys

Statistics	PSS-14 score
Mean	26.38
Standard Deviation	2.20
Minimum	21
Maximum	30

The scores indicate a moderate level of perceived stress across the athlete population, with limited variability, suggesting a generally uniform experience of organizational stressors in competitive basketball environments. To assess gender-based differences in perceived stress, an independent-samples t-test was conducted comparing the male and female subgroups:

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study highlighted a predominance of moderate stress among athletes, with emotional and cognitive stress emerging as particularly impactful. Emotional burdens related to uncertainty, pressure to perform, and lack of control were strongly correlated with elevated overall stress levels, suggesting a pressing need for mental health and coping strategy interventions within sports organizations. The findings also demonstrate the interconnection between cognitive stress and behavioral coping difficulties, underscoring the complexity of stress responses in competitive environments.

While some athletes manage stress effectively, a substantial group struggles with emotional overload and inadequate coping mechanisms, placing them at risk for burnout or performance decline. To promote athlete well-being and performance sustainability, sports organizations should implement comprehensive stress management programs. These should include psychological support, emotional regulation strategies, and resilience-building interventions tailored to the needs of athletes. Strengthening mental health resources can contribute significantly to both individual athlete development and the long-term success of sports institutions.

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