



## Impact of COVID-19 on Flemish athletes' lives

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### ABSTRACT

For many athletes, COVID-19 has presented itself as a barrier to the pursuit of athletic excellence, while for others the pandemic has been a facilitator to explore different opportunities and directions in life. COVID-19 has affected the lives of athletes in different ways and domains, including changes and challenges in the athletic (e.g. adapted training conditions, postponed or cancelled competitions), academic (e.g. accelerated or delayed study duration), vocational (e.g. switch from professional athlete to combining elite sport with work), psychological (e.g. setting new goals, increased anxiety and uncertainty), psychosocial (e.g. more time at home, isolation), financial (e.g. changed income and funding) and legal domains (e.g. traveling restrictions). The aim of this research was to monitor athletes' life satisfaction and perceived impact of COVID-19 during the entire pandemic period. In total, 219 Flemish athletes (mean age = 23; 49% female; 62% students) completed the Holistic Monitoring Questionnaire (HMQ; De Brandt et al., 2019) on different time points during the pandemic. New longitudinal data is still being collected until the end of the pandemic. The HMQ measures athletes' satisfaction about different aspects of life (i.e. sport, study, dual career, social life, physical health, mental health, wellbeing, sleep, recovery, nutrition, financial situation) and the perceived impact of COVID-19 on these life aspects (i.e. from very negative to very positive impact) on two five-point scales. In addition, open responses were collected about the reasons why athletes are (not) satisfied and perceive a certain impact. Results over the entire measurement period indicated that athletes, on average, were most satisfied about their physical health, recovery and sport, and least satisfied about their social life and sleep. Satisfaction about social life significantly increased (+40%) over the course of the pandemic. Team athletes consistently perceived the impact of COVID-19 on their recovery, sleep and mental health as less negative compared to individual athletes. Specifically for mental health, results showed that 28% experienced a negative impact of corona on mental health, expressed in increased anxiety and worry, feelings of uncertainty, lack/loss of control, and reduced motivation. On the contrary, 48% of athletes experienced no impact on mental health, and 16% reported a positive impact on mental health (e.g. reduced stress levels, increased control and better life balance; more time to invest in maintaining mental health). Further quantitative and qualitative analyses will be performed and applied recommendations will be presented during the conference.

**KEYWORDS**

Corona; dual career; holistic development; mental health

