



## Dual career and mental health

Paul Wylleman

Vrije Universiteit Brussel

### ABSTRACT

Although the number of studies on dual elite sport and study careers in Europe has increased enormously the past decades (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019), the amount of research on the topic of mental health within this dual career (DC) domain was less numerous. In an attempt to tackle this research gap, this symposium focuses on the topic of mental health within the DC context, bringing forward different perspectives. First, Jolan Kegelaers provides a review on those studies that did focus on mental health in the population of student-athletes. This review confirms that limited studies have specifically focused on mental health (or ill-health) in the DC context and that there is only very limited research on the DC-specific factors that impact mental health and vice versa. The second presentation in this symposium by Koen De Brandt, directly counters this need, by providing the first results of the Dual Careers for Mental Health project (DC4MH). This presentation will provide results of the first phase of the project, whereby athletes from 6 different countries were involved, providing insight in the bi-directional association between dual career experiences (protective or risk factors) and mental health. In the third and fourth presentation, the role of COVID-19 on mental health within DC contexts, is brought to the attention. Joan Pons provides insight in how the pandemic impacted mental health in student-athletes, showing the important role of the environment (e.g., support for their self-esteem). Marta Borrueto will present findings on female student-athletes, illustrating the importance of support by clubs/sport organizations in helping female athletes to cope with the additional challenges brought forward by the pandemic. Based on these presentations, the discussant will bring forward several topics and lines of future research to be discussed, amongst others: (a) The need for more studies focussing on a positive mental health perspective (rather than solely focussing on mental-ill-health and deficit perspectives) and how this positive psychology perspective could be integrated within research (e.g., prospective longitudinal research) and practice (e.g., interventions focussing on proactive resilience enhancement); (b) The avenues for future research and good practices on the impact of COVID-19 on mental health in DC contexts; and (c) the role of policy-makers and organisations in ensuring mental health within DC contexts.

### KEYWORDS

Mental health; Dual careers; Covid-19