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MENTiS

From Seeds to a Forest: Cultivating Mental Health Together

Mental Health Literacy

**Promoting mental health through the entourage
in high-performance sport - MENTiS**



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MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY

Theoretical background:

Mental health is defined by the World Health Organisation as: “A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (WHO, 2022). In line with the mental health continuum model (Keyes, 2002), the WHO definition highlights that mental health reflects high levels of social, psychological, and emotional wellbeing and functioning, as well as the absence of mental ill-health or mental disorders.

Mental health literacy was originally defined as the “knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management or prevention” (Jorm et al., 1997). However, in line with the dual continuum model, mental health literacy may relate to more than just knowledge relating to mental disorders or mental ill-health. It can also relate to knowing how to improve and maintain positive mental health and well-being in oneself and others. As such, in this handbook we adhere to a more recent, holistic definition of mental health literacy as “understanding how to obtain and maintain positive mental health; understanding mental disorders and their treatments; decreasing stigma related to mental disorders; and, enhancing help-seeking efficacy” (Kutcher et al., 2016).

Literacy interventions play a crucial role as primary interventions, targeting population-wide prevention by improving knowledge of mental health symptoms and their causes, and reducing stigma in athletes as well as their entourages. Entourage members form a particularly suited target population for such first-line interventions given the high levels of mental health and help-seeking stigma which still exists within high-performance sport.

Athletes face several different stressors in their daily lives. Said stressors can be identified in their sporting environment (e.g., stigma towards help-seeking, lack of support from coaches or teammates, sport-specific stressors, deselection), or can be personal stressors (e.g., injury, overtraining, career dissatisfaction, negative social relationships, adverse life events, poor habits) (Kuettel & Larsen, 2019). At the same time, it is also possible to identify protective factors in the sport-environmental domain (e.g., mental health literacy and support from entourage, trust, positive sporting relationship, satisfactory career transitions) and in the personal domain (e.g., recovery, protective behaviour, feeling of competence, autonomy, basic need satisfaction), that allow athletes to successfully overcome the challenges they are faced with.

Workshop goals:

After this section, you will be able to:

- Understanding the importance of talking about mental health in sport.
- Define mental health.
- Differentiate between mental health-related false beliefs and reality.
- Understand how referral works in their organisations and their countries.



1. Mental health in sport

Purpose:

- Reduce mental health stigma,
- Help encourage understand that mental health and ill-health is a common topic in sport as well, and needs to be addressed.



2. What is mental health?

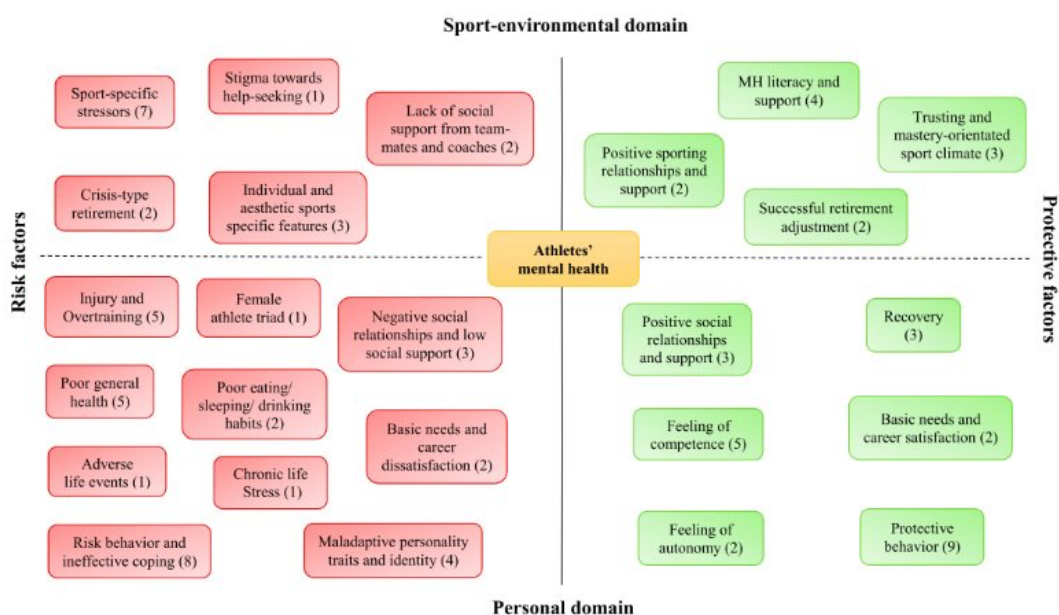
Purpose:

- Provide a definition of mental health.

3. Risk and protective factors in athletes

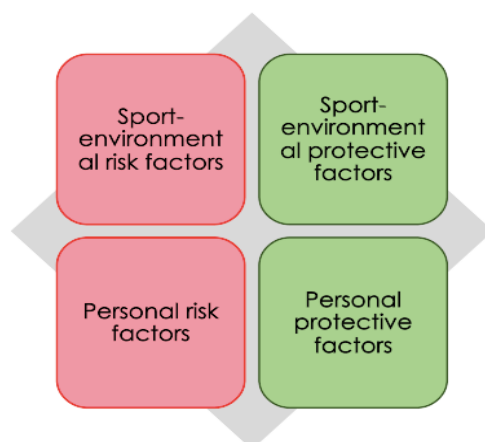
Purpose:

- Reflect on factors that can influence athletes' mental health, both positively and negatively.



(Kuettel & Larsen, 2019).

Activity: In order to reflect on the different factors that can influence the mental health of athletes, below we present a story. Read the story carefully. What risk and protective factors can we find?



Milo's story

Name: Milo

Sport: Basketball

Sport career moment: going through retirement

Risk factors: stress, injury, crisis-type retirement.

Protective factors: positive personal relationships.

Milo's story: Milo, 33 years old, had lived and breathed basketball since he could remember. From his first dribble to his last three-pointer, the court was his sanctuary. But as the years passed, so did the toll on his body. Stress fractures turned into chronic pain, and the once effortless jumps became a struggle.

Facing retirement wasn't just hanging up his jersey; it was bidding farewell to a part of himself. The thought gnawed at him like a persistent injury, threatening to overshadow the joy he found in the game.

Due to the high-demands from his high-performance career – constant travelling, long hours of training, changing teams and countries – he had focused all his resources on his athletic career and did not develop any interest besides sports. Nowadays, when retirement feels around the corner, he was starting to regret his decision.

However, Milo wasn't alone in his journey. His teammates, coaches, and family stood by him, offering unwavering support. Their encouragement became his lifeline, helping him navigate the tumultuous transition. As Milo grappled with the uncertainty of what lay beyond the court, his loved ones reminded him of his worth beyond the game.



4. False beliefs on mental health and ill-health

Purpose:

- Reduce stigma toward mental health,
- Reflect on some common misconceptions about mental health and ill-health.

Activity: What do you think of these beliefs? Read them carefully and reflect on each one of them.

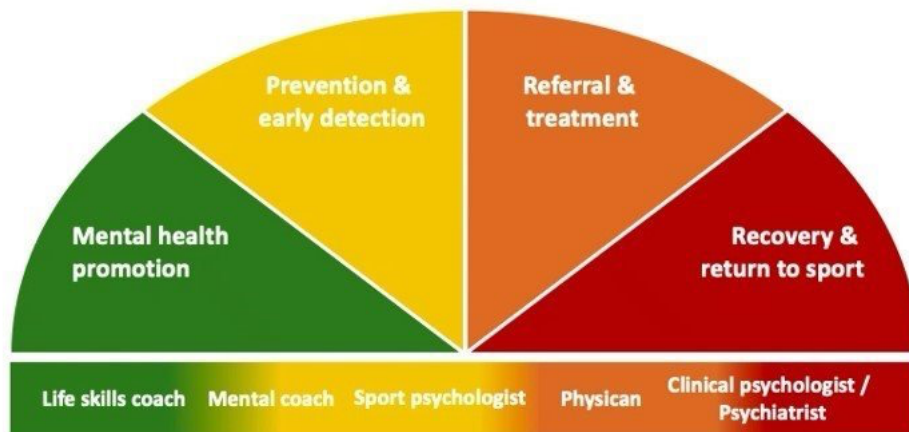
- Once you have a mental health problem, you'll suffer from it for the rest of your life.
- Everyone with a mental health problem will get better if they have the willpower to do so.
- If someone is struggling with their mental health, it is better to ignore/hide it.
- If you have mental health problems, you cannot be successful.

5. Referral system

Purpose:

- Clarify how referral works in general.

Continuum of care



(Adaptation of Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994)

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