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ATHLETES MENTAL HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

This paper focus for the Athletes mental Impact of the Sports Understanding and positively influencing athlete mental health have become key goals for researchers and sporting stakeholders (e.g. coaches, support staff, clubs and governing bodies). In this article, we outline a novel perspective for tackling these challenges, drawing on an influential theory of group processes. This social identity approach can, we argue, help explain when and why the characteristics and demands of sport, which is typically a collective Endeavour, pose a threat to athlete mental health and provide a guiding framework for efforts to protect and enhance athlete mental health. Here, we seek to illustrate the value of a social identity analysis of athlete mental health through three key points that speak to its analytical and practical value. Specifically, we propose: that social identities can act as psychological resources that support athlete mental health, that social identities are critical to athlete mental health during and after sporting transitions and that leadership informed by a social identity approach can facilitate athlete mental health. With a view to maximizing the value of our analysis both for those working with athletes and for researchers, we also identify practical steps that relevant stakeholders could take to support athlete mental health, and key avenues for future research to further test our propositions and advance understanding. Our analysis provides a new lens through which all those invested in understanding and supporting athlete mental health can approach these challenges, and a foundation for novel solutions.

KEYWORDS: social identity, mental health, leadership.

INTRODUCTION:-

Athlete mental health has increasingly become part of the public consciousness. During the Tokyo Olympics, for example, it took centre stage when Simone Biles—one of the most high-profile athletes at the games—withdraw from competition citing mental health concerns and many other athletes revealed mental health struggles . Athlete mental health has also become an increasing priority for researchers and policy makers. Indeed, there have been nine mental health position statements published by sport governing bodies since 2018 and several recent attempts to synthesize and guide athlete mental health research. Researchers’ interest in athlete mental health has been driven by a growing awareness of the prevalence of mental ill-health among athletes, and of the sport-specific risk factors for mental ill-health that athletes face. Alongside the general stressors that athletes share with

the general population (e.g. adverse life events), additional factors that pose a specific threat to athletes'—particularly elite athletes'—mental health include competition for selection, physical injuries and poor performance .

A recent meta-analysis estimated that 34% of current elite athletes experience depression or anxiety, 26% experience sleep disturbance and 20% experience psychological distress prevalence rates that are at least comparable to those in the general population (see also. Indeed, these statistics likely underestimate the problem. Stigma, low mental health literacy and busy schedules are among the many barriers to athletes seeking diagnosis and support for mental health concerns . In this article, we argue that efforts to understand and improve athlete mental health will be fruitfully enhanced by tackling these challenges through the lens of the social identity approach . This is not least because the social identity approach provides a comprehensive analysis of how people's individual behaviors and psychology, including their mental health, are shaped by *group life*. The social identity framework can therefore help explain when and why the characteristics and demands of sport, which is typically a collective Endeavour, even for athletes who compete in individual sports, pose a potential threat to mental health, as well as help identify potential opportunities for intervention.

In the sections that follow, we first provide a short introduction to the social identity approach, noting that detailed outlines are available elsewhere . Then, drawing on specific hypotheses offered by the social identity approach and evidence from extant research, we outline three key points that speak to the value of using a social identity lens in the context of athlete mental health. In the process, we focus on (a) practical steps that relevant stakeholders (e.g. coaches, support staff, clubs and governing bodies) could take to support athlete mental health that follow from a social identity analysis and (b) key avenues to explore in future research to further test our propositions and advance understanding. In recognition that sport-specific stressors are more pronounced at higher levels of competition our analysis is often oriented toward and arguably most relevant for, elite athletes. Nevertheless, our points also apply to an analysis of mental health for athletes competing at sub-elite levels.

AREA OF THE STUDY:-

This narrative review intends to critically examine existing therapies and preventive approaches while also combining pertinent prevalence data to better comprehend the burden of mental health in sports communities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:-

Primary and secondary data sources collected. The present study based on the primary and secondary data. Primary data are collected from the respondents belonging to project area with the help of interview schedule and secondary data published and unpublished works on the subjects, reports of Government and expert bodies respectively.

OBJECTIVES:-

The utility of systematic reviews to synthesize research on discrete topics and identify gaps in knowledge is well established; however, to date, there have been no such reviews of the mental health and psychological wellbeing of elite athletes. The objective of this review was to synthesize the growing evidence base regarding the incidence and nature of mental ill-health (including substance use) and psychological wellbeing among elite-level athletes in order to identify gaps that future research should priorities, and inform strategies or guidelines to advance the detection and management of mental ill-health in this population.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:-

(Kuettel & Larsen, 2020) according to Mental health and wellbeing are critical aspects of an athlete's career, influencing them during and after their time in sports. Athletes face unique challenges, including intense training programs, frequent travel, contract uncertainties, the short-lived nature of professional sports, and constant media scrutiny, combining to create a unique wellbeing experience for athletes.

(Henriksen et al., 2020) emphasizes these sport-specific stressors can increase vulnerability to mental health and wellbeing issues. A systematic review by Rice and colleagues' (2016) further highlights these vulnerabilities, revealing a heightened risk of mental health challenges, particularly during retirement transitions periods of injury and following performance setbacks In response to these risks, a range of structured mental health supports for athletes has been developed. The following sub-section outlines these supports

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Beyond the sporting context, it is well established that negative work group environments pose a major threat to people's mental health . Although numerous factors can contribute to groups becoming 'toxic', the individuals who often have the greatest capacity to influence a group's culture and climate — either positively or negatively — are *leaders*. Recognising this, researchers have devoted substantial attention to understanding how, by engaging in different leadership styles and behaviors, leaders can (a) foster an environment that supports group members to flourish and (b) help protect against (or, conversely, contribute to) work groups becoming toxic for a review). Very few studies with these goals have been conducted in sport for an exception). However, researchers have highlighted the important influence that team environments can have on athlete mental health and suggested that coaches have a key role to play in fostering a team environment that supports athlete mental health . Instances of elite athletes highlighting the negative cultures they have perceived in high-performance teams and programmes have also become more frequent, with failings in leadership often cited as a reason for such cultures developing (including in independent investigations

The social identity approach provides an analysis of effective leadership that appears particularly well suited to explaining how leaders can create a positive group environment. This is not least because, contrary to many leadership theories, which focus on the leader in isolation and emphasize traits or behaviours that they should possess or demonstrate *as individuals* the social identity approach to leadership places the group at the heart of its

analysis. More specifically, it proposes that leaders' capacity to facilitate positive group member outcomes and mobilize group members toward common goals rests on the extent to which they are able to foster a sense of shared identity (i.e. a shared sense of 'us') among group members. To this end, it argues that leaders should strive to engage in actions and activities that: (1) demonstrate that they *represent* the group's identity (i.e. what it means to be one of 'us'); (2) *advance* the group's identity and interests; (3) help *create* a sense of shared group identity and define what it means to be a group member; and (4) help *embed* the group's identity in reality (e.g. by providing practical activities that enable members to 'live out' their shared identity); speaking to the causal effects of identity leadership, researchers have found initial evidence that identity leadership training programmes can have downstream benefits for athlete mental health.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:-

Mental health disorders among high-performance athletes and those who strive to be one arise from an interaction of multiple stressors and vulnerabilities, especially in the face of transition (i.e., onset or exacerbation of symptoms) and significant life stress (injury, transitioning out of sport, and times of intense performance demand). Cognitive concussion etiology, treatment, and outcome are highly consequential. Disabling injuries, such as concussions, impair training and induce psychological stress, with 17–46% of athletes suffering from anxiety and/or depression following the injury. Career transition (i.e., from junior to senior and from the end of a career) is recognized as a struggle of identity for athletes, which is expressed by stress, and this sometimes results in subclinical symptoms such as low self-esteem. Increased pressure to perform, in addition to over 600 sport-specific stressors (e.g., competition demands and maladaptive perfectionism), has been found to elevate anxiety levels, particularly during peak competitive years (15–25 years old) that are established to have parallel developmental changes in youth athletes. For adolescent athletes, younger age groups add stressors, such as academic-sport conflicts and peer comparisons to age-specific cohorts and susceptibility to mental health. These issues are most appropriately considered from a biopsychosocial perspective, in which biological elements (e.g., concussion or pubertal changes) converge with psychological characteristics (e.g., perfectionism) and social pressures (e.g., coaching styles and parental expectations). Overtraining (e.g., SGMs testing is compared to regular training), for example, can create depressive symptomatology with performance-oriented environments, worsening stress (with immoral family members' collusion) and causing the at-risk young to navigate their stress-visiting confusions. Youth athletes are under more far-reaching external social pressure from peers and parents, which may increase anxiety and body dissatisfaction, especially in appearance-related sports. This biopsychosocial model emphasizes the importance of targeted interventions addressing physical recovery, cognitive coping, and supportive social systems, with special emphasis on developmental periods in youth athletes to enhance resilience and reduce the likelihood of clinical syndromes.

CONCLUSION:-

The characteristics and demands of sport can pose a major threat to athlete mental health, particularly at the elite level. The social identity approach is a potentially fruitful framework through which to understand how and why these characteristics and demands can threaten athlete mental health. It has the potential to guide novel approaches that prevent mental ill-health among athletes, reduce their mental ill-health symptoms and support

them to flourish. Through three key points, we have sought to illustrate the social identity approach's utility in the context of athlete mental health. Our hope is that this provides those seeking to support athlete mental health with a new perspective and a different set of ideas from which to draw, and acts as a stimulus for researchers to expand the evidence base and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the social identity approach's value in this context. The integration of comprehensive psychosocial support systems within professional sporting organizations is crucial for the holistic development and wellbeing of athletes. While advancements have been made in establishing best-practice standards and frameworks, challenges persist, particularly the disconnect between athletic performance priorities and the meaningful integration of wellbeing into the sporting environment.

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