

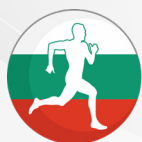


Co-funded by the
European Union



#SMS Strong Mind for Success

Mind Matters: Exploring Mental Health in Young Football Players



BSDA
Bulgarian Sports
Development Association



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About #SMS – Strong Mind for Success

Strong Mind for Success or shortly #SMS is an Erasmus Plus co-funded initiative aiming to build capacity in sport organisations nowadays in the field of mental care awareness and care towards youth athletes. Strong Mind for Success project delivered innovative education on how **mental health** can contribute to the successful development of young football players in Bulgaria, Italy and Slovenia. #SMS used the knowledge gathered from the results of the objectives and policies from the European Action Plans on Mental Health and focused on educating young football players on mental health awareness. The target group of #SMS were youth players aged 13 – 17, male and female as this age parameter is crucial for the psychological development of the athletes. The relevance and need of such project are supported by the scarcity of data not on what is the effect of sport on mental health, but rather the opposite. During the project has been analysed as well the aspects on how can we use mental health in order to prepare the players mentally and produce quality performance on the field and hopefully on the professional level. With the present project, the consortium aims to further develop the skills of managers as well on how to approach the mental aspects of their players, hopefully acquire the services of more mental health experts and introduce a more holistic approach to football preparation.

Main project outputs:

- Online platform, available at www.sportsuccess.org on the importance of addressing mental health in the sport;
- **#SMS International Seminar and National Trainings** dedicated to the education of the youth football players on the topic of mental health and how a holistic approach can be applied to their professional development;
- Quality educational and research activities focused on the development of **mental health** amongst youth football players.

Strong Mind for Success is a partnership between 3 different EU countries through experienced organizations in the field of sport with know-how of project management that they can transfer in the project lifetime – Bulgarian sports development association as coordinator in partnership with “LORMA” from Italy and sport club “Endorfin” from Slovenia.

Curious to find more? Follow Strong Mind for Success on Facebook for updates or visit project platform at www.sportsuccess.org to empower athletes mental health.





Understanding mental health

In the world of mental health, understanding the very essence of our emotional, psychological, and social well-being is paramount. Mental health isn't merely the absence of mental disorders; it encompasses the intricate balance of our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Picture it as a delicate tapestry woven from our deepest emotions, our cognitive processes, and our interactions with the world around us.

As our societies evolve, there's a notable transformation in how mental health is perceived. A wave of awareness is sweeping across the globe, illuminating the shadows that once shrouded mental health issues. People are beginning to comprehend the complexities of these challenges, fostering empathy and understanding. This heightened awareness is akin to a beacon of light breaking through the darkness of stigma, making it easier for individuals to step forward and seek help.

Imagine a world where individuals are not judged by their mental health struggles but are instead supported with compassion and care. This shift in societal attitudes signifies progress—a collective stride towards a more empathetic and inclusive world. It sets the stage for a narrative where mental health is not a taboo topic but a crucial aspect of our well-being, acknowledged, understood, and nurtured in the same way we care for our physical health.

This newfound awareness is not merely a concept but a societal transformation, a narrative unfolding in real-time. It's a testament to our evolving understanding of the human mind and the importance of mental health in our lives. This understanding forms the very heart of our journey—a journey towards holistic well-being, acceptance, and support for every individual, regardless of their mental health status.

In the vast landscape of mental health, there are intricate components that shape our overall well-being, much like the diverse colours that blend harmoniously to create a masterpiece. Let's embark on a journey through these essential facets, each one contributing uniquely to the tapestry of our mental health.



Components of Mental Health:

Emotional Well-being:

Imagine emotions as the vibrant hues that paint the canvas of our minds. They are the raw, unfiltered expressions of our innermost feelings—joy, sorrow, love, fear. Emotional well-being isn't about banishing negative emotions but understanding them. It's about navigating the ebbs and flows of life's emotional tides, acknowledging our feelings, and learning to manage them. Just as a skilled artist combines various shades to evoke emotions in their artwork, understanding and managing our emotions are the brushstrokes that create emotional harmony within us.

Psychological Well-being:

Within the realm of mental health, the power of the mind reigns supreme. Our thoughts shape our reality, painting the world around us with positivity or negativity. A positive mindset acts as a beacon of light, guiding us through challenges. It is the resilient spirit that bounces back from setbacks, learning and growing amidst adversity. Think of psychological well-being as the unwavering foundation of a grand castle—the mindset, the coping mechanism, and the resilience are the sturdy bricks that fortify our mental strength, allowing us to weather life's storms with grace.

Social Well-being:

Humans are inherently social beings, entwined in a web of relationships and connections. Imagine social well-being as the vibrant threads weaving through the fabric of our lives. It encompasses the warmth of friendships, the uncon-

ditional love of family, and the support of communities. These connections are the pillars that support us when we falter, the safety nets that catch us when we fall. Social well-being isn't just about the number of friends we have but the quality of our relationships and the depth of our support networks. It's the shared laughter, the comforting embraces, and the words of encouragement that remind us—we are never truly alone.

In this intricate tapestry of mental health, emotional well-being, psychological strength, and social connections converge, creating a resilient, empathetic, and harmonious existence. Each component, like a vital thread, weaves its story, contributing to the beautiful narrative of our mental well-being. As we embrace and nurture these facets, we embark on a transformative journey—one that leads us towards holistic mental health, inner peace, and a profound understanding of the intricate beauty of our minds.





Common Mental Health Challenges:

In the vast mosaic of mental health, there are certain patterns, shades of emotions, and states of mind that, while common, can significantly impact our lives. These are the threads of common mental health challenges - subtle yet profound, affecting countless souls in their unique ways.

Anxiety

Imagine anxiety as a shadow that casts its veil over the mind, clouding it with worry and unease. It's an emotion we all experience, but when it transforms into a disorder, it becomes a relentless presence. Anxiety can manifest in various forms, from generalized anxiety to specific phobias, crippling individuals with overwhelming fear. The heart races, palms sweat, and a sense of impending doom lingers. Anxiety affects millions globally, reminding us of the delicate balance within our minds.

Depression

Depression, a profound darkness that envelops the soul, paints the world in shades of hopelessness and despair. It robs individuals of their zest for life, replacing it with a heavy emptiness. In the depths of depression, even the simplest tasks feel like insurmountable mountains. A pervasive sadness, loss of interest, and fatigue mark its presence. It's a silent battle fought by millions, reminding us of the fragility of the human spirit.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

Fear of Missing Out, a contemporary phenomenon in our hyperconnected world, engulfs individuals in the anxiety of not being present in every social event or experience. It's a struggle between the desire for connection and the overwhelming fear of exclusion. FOMO highlights the complexities of social interactions in the digital age, reminding us of the fine balance between staying connected and preserving our mental well-being.

Acceptance of Winning and Losing

The dichotomy of winning and losing, prevalent in various aspects of life, can significantly impact mental health. While winning brings elation and a sense of achievement, the fear of failure looms large, creating an internal battle-field. Learning to gracefully accept victories and defeats is a profound psychological challenge, reflecting the intricate relationship between self-worth and external validation. Navigating these extremes requires resilience and a deep understanding of one's worth beyond mere outcomes.

Self-Esteem and Self-Identity

Self-esteem, the foundation upon which mental well-being stands, often faces relentless attacks from self-doubt and societal pressures. The quest for self-identity in a world full of expectations and comparisons can be overwhelming. Many grapple with questions of self-worth, struggling to find their place in the world. Cultivating a positive self-image and embracing individuality becomes a challenging yet essential journey, shaping the way individuals perceive themselves and interact with the world.

Pressure from Environment, Parents, and Coaches

The relentless expectations and demands placed upon individuals, particularly young people, by their surrounding environment, parents, and sports coaches can lead to a significant mental health challenge. This pressure manifests in various forms, including academic achievements, athletic performance, and personal behaviour. Young individuals often face enormous stress to meet these expectations, leading to heightened anxiety, fear of failure, and self-doubt.

Perfectionism

Perfectionism, a silent tyrant, demands flawless performance in every aspect of life. It sets unattainable standards, leading to chronic dissatisfaction and anxiety. The pursuit of perfection often masks deep-seated insecurities and fear of judgment. Breaking free from the clutches of perfectionism requires embracing imperfections and recognizing the beauty in vulnerability. It's a battle against the unrealistic ideals society imposes, highlighting the importance of self-compassion and self-acceptance.

Eating Disorders

Eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, create turbulent relationships with food, body image, and self-worth. They whisper destructive messages, distorting perceptions and driving individuals toward harmful behaviours. The quest for control over one's body can lead to severe physical and emotional consequences. Eating disorders reflect the complexities of self-esteem, societal pressures, and the pursuit of an elusive ideal.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, a whirlwind of restlessness and impulsivity, shapes the experiences of many, especially in childhood. Focusing on tasks becomes a Herculean effort, while impulses lead to actions before thoughts can catch up. ADHD weaves a tapestry of distracted minds and unbridled energy, reminding us of the diverse ways our brains process the world.

These mental health challenges are threads that weave their narratives, shaping the experiences of those who live with them. Understanding them is not merely an academic pursuit but an essential step toward empathy and support. Each mental health challenge, with its unique symptoms and prevalence, underscores the importance of compassion, awareness, and accessible mental health care. As we acknowledge these common mental health challenges, we take a step closer to fostering a world where understanding replaces stigma and compassion replaces judgment. Each of these difficulties intricately intertwines with the human psyche, leaving indelible marks on the individuals who face them. By acknowledging these complexities, we move closer to fostering empathy, understanding, and a supportive environment for all. In the collective effort to unravel the intricacies of mental health, we pave the way for a more compassionate and inclusive world, where every individual's journey is honoured and embraced.

Mental Health in Modern Society

In today's fast-paced world, mental health has become a critical concern, influenced by a myriad of challenges arising from our modern way of life. One of the significant contributors to mental health issues is the unrelenting stress that accompanies the demands of contemporary living. The constant rush, the never-ending to-do lists, and the pressure to meet societal standards create an environment where stress thrives. This chronic stress takes a toll on emotional well-being, often leading to anxiety, depression, and a sense of overwhelming despair.



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Moreover, the pervasive influence of social media has profoundly impacted how individuals perceive themselves and others. The incessant comparison triggered by carefully curated online personas often leads to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. The need to measure up to unrealistic beauty standards, lifestyles, or achievements showcased on social media platforms intensifies the pressure on individuals, especially the younger generation, contributing significantly to their mental health struggles.

In the realm of work, the pressure to excel and the fear of job insecurity have given rise to work-related stress. Long working hours, tight deadlines, and the constant need to stay connected through technology blur the lines between personal and professional life. Achieving a healthy work-life balance has become increasingly challenging, making it difficult for individuals to unwind and recharge, essential elements for maintaining good mental health.

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach. Encouraging open conversations about mental health, fostering supportive environments both at home and in the workplace, and promoting self-care practices are essential steps toward creating a society where mental well-being is prioritised. Recognizing the importance of a balanced life, where work commitments do not overshadow personal time, is fundamental in alleviating the burden of stress and promoting a healthier mental state for everyone.



Impact on Physical Health

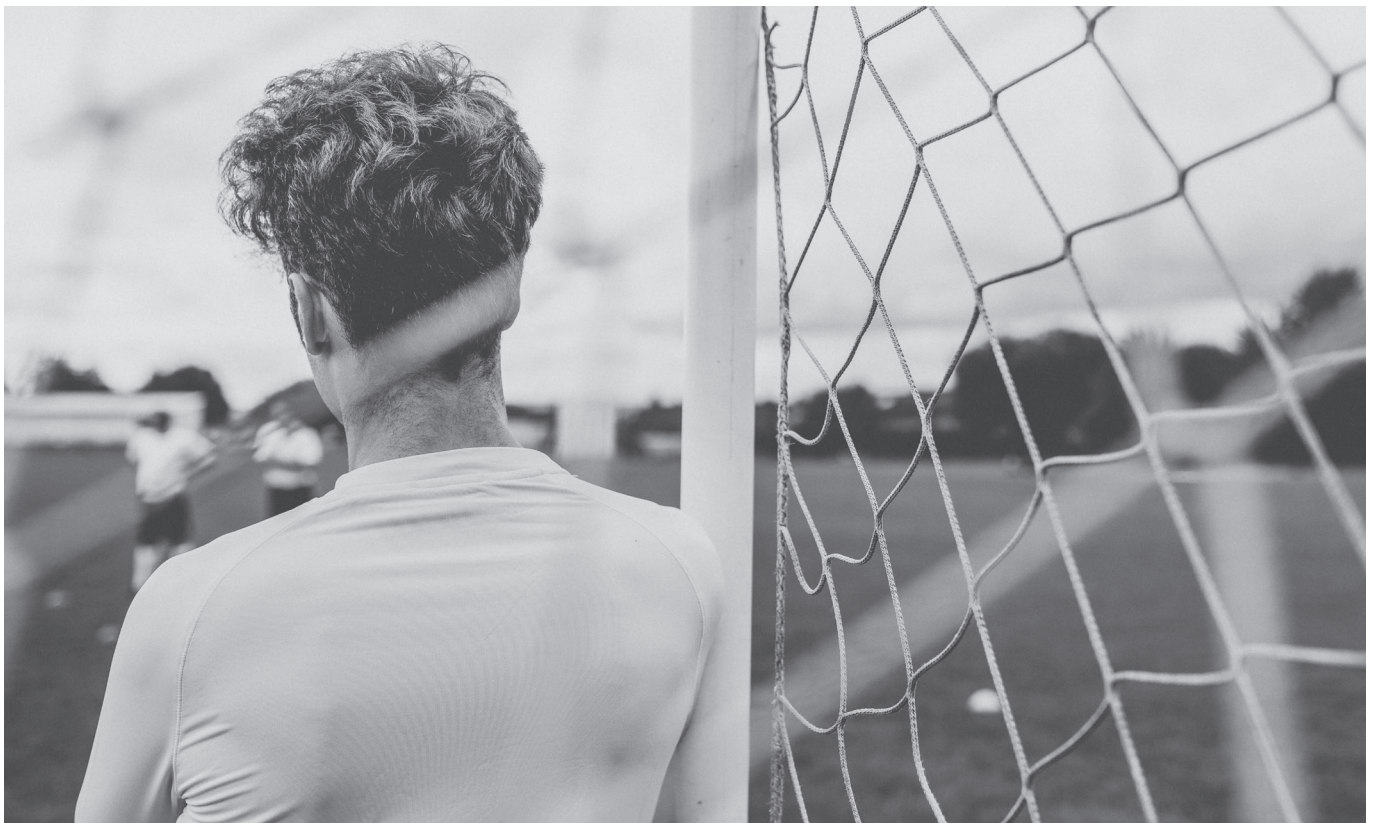
The intricate relationship between mental and physical health is a fundamental aspect of overall well-being, with the state of one significantly influencing the other. When mental health is compromised, it can have profound implications on our physical well-being. Chronic stress, anxiety, and depression, if left unaddressed, can manifest in tangible ways, affecting various systems within the body.

One of the most apparent connections between mental and physical health lies in the realm of cardiovascular diseases. The constant strain of stress, coupled with anxiety and depression, can elevate blood pressure and contribute to the development of heart-related issues. The physiological responses triggered by chronic mental health problems can strain the heart, potentially leading to conditions like hypertension and, in severe cases, heart attacks.

Furthermore, the impact of mental health on the immune system is significant. Prolonged stress weakens the immune response, making individuals more susceptible to infections and illnesses. The body's ability to fight off diseases diminishes under the weight of persistent mental health challenges, leaving it vulnerable to various ailments.

Additionally, individuals struggling with mental health issues often find it challenging to maintain healthy lifestyle habits. Poor eating patterns, lack of exercise, and disrupted sleep, common consequences of mental health problems, further contribute to physical health deterioration. The body's ability to heal, recover, and defend itself is compromised when mental health is compromised.

Recognizing the link between mental and physical health underscores the importance of holistic well-being. Addressing mental health challenges not only promotes emotional stability but also acts as a preventive measure against a range of physical ailments. It emphasises the need for comprehensive healthcare that integrates both mental and physical health, ensuring individuals receive the support necessary to nurture their overall health and lead fulfilling lives.



Economic and Social Impacts:

The ramifications of mental health issues extend far beyond individual struggles, casting a substantial economic and social shadow over communities and societies. Economically, the burden of mental health problems is staggering. Healthcare costs associated with treating mental illnesses, ranging from therapy sessions to medications, contribute significantly to national healthcare expenditures. Moreover, the indirect costs, such as reduced productivity in the workplace and increased absenteeism, create a substantial economic strain. Mental health challenges can diminish work efficiency, leading to lost hours, decreased output, and impaired decision-making, all of which collectively impact a nation's workforce and economy.



In addition to the economic burden, mental health issues face the hurdle of social stigma. Despite progress in understanding mental health, persistent misconceptions and prejudice prevail, preventing many individuals from seeking the help they need. This social stigma perpetuates a culture of silence and shame, hindering open discussions about mental health. Consequently, those affected often suffer in silence, fearing judgement and ostracism.

The consequences of this social stigma are profound. Individuals grappling with mental health problems may refrain from reaching out to friends, family, or professionals, fearing discrimination. This isolation exacerbates their struggles, creating a cycle of despair and loneliness. It also deters society from acknowledging mental health as an essential component of overall well-being, perpetuating a climate where mental health concerns are often overlooked or dismissed.

To combat these challenges, societies must work collectively to dismantle the social stigma surrounding mental health. By fostering understanding, empathy, and acceptance, communities can create an environment where individuals feel safe to discuss their mental health concerns openly. Furthermore, addressing the economic burden requires increased investment in mental healthcare services, research, and public awareness campaigns. By recognizing mental health as a vital aspect of societal well-being, communities can foster an atmosphere of support and inclusivity, ensuring that everyone has access to the assistance they need to lead healthy, fulfilling lives.





Promoting Mental Wellness:

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need for comprehensive mental health programs that extend beyond clinical interventions. Mental wellness initiatives have emerged as vital components of schools, workplaces, and communities, playing a crucial role in fostering supportive environments and enhancing overall well-being.

In educational settings, mental wellness programs equip students with essential coping skills, emotional intelligence, and resilience, enabling them to navigate the challenges of academic pressures and peer relationships. These programs not only provide education about mental health but also create safe spaces where students can openly discuss their concerns and seek guidance. By nurturing emotional intelligence from a young age, these initiatives empower future generations to handle stress, anxiety, and interpersonal challenges effectively.

Similarly, workplaces have recognized the importance of mental wellness initiatives for their employees. Stress, often a product of modern work environments, can severely impact productivity and job satisfaction. Mental wellness programs in workplaces focus on stress management, work-life balance, and creating a supportive atmosphere. By promoting open communication, encouraging employees to take breaks, and offering counselling services, these initiatives address the root causes of workplace stress, fostering a healthier work environment.

Mindfulness and Meditation:

One of the cornerstones of promoting mental wellness is the practice of mindfulness and meditation. These ancient techniques have gained widespread recognition for their transformative effects on mental health. Mindfulness, the practice of being present in the moment without judgement, allows individuals to cultivate self-awareness and reduce



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the impact of stressors. By acknowledging thoughts and emotions without becoming overwhelmed by them, individuals develop resilience and emotional regulation skills.

Meditation, on the other hand, offers a structured approach to achieving mental clarity and emotional balance. Through various meditation techniques, individuals can quiet the mind, reduce anxiety, and improve overall emotional well-being. Regular meditation practice has been linked to reduced symptoms of depression, improved focus, and enhanced emotional stability.

By incorporating mindfulness and meditation into mental wellness programs, schools, workplaces, and communities empower individuals to manage their mental health proactively. These practices not only reduce stress but also promote self-reflection, empathy, and a sense of inner peace. As society increasingly recognizes the importance of mental wellness, the integration of mindfulness and meditation stands as a cornerstone in the holistic approach to nurturing a mentally healthy population.

Integrated Healthcare:

Recognizing mental health as an integral component of overall well-being, there is a pressing need to integrate mental health services with primary healthcare systems. The integration ensures early detection of mental health issues and timely interventions, preventing the escalation of problems. When mental health professionals collaborate closely with primary care physicians, individuals can receive comprehensive care that addresses both physical and psychological aspects of their health. This approach not only improves outcomes but also reduces the stigma associated with seeking mental health support.

In recent years, the advent of teletherapy and online mental health support platforms has revolutionized the accessibility of mental healthcare. Teletherapy allows individuals to connect with licensed therapists remotely, breaking down geographical barriers and providing support to those in remote or underserved areas. Online platforms offer a wide range of resources, from self-help tools to counselling sessions, catering to diverse needs. The convenience and confidentiality offered by these digital platforms have significantly contributed to making mental healthcare more accessible and destigmatized.

Community and Social Support:

Communities and social support networks play a pivotal role in promoting mental health. Support groups, helplines, and community activities create spaces where individuals can share their experiences, seek advice, and find solace in knowing they are not alone. These platforms foster a sense of belonging and understanding, reducing feelings of isolation often associated with mental health challenges.

Helplines staffed by trained volunteers offer immediate assistance to individuals in crisis, providing a lifeline during moments of despair. Community activities, such as art classes, sports clubs, or gardening groups, provide opportunities for social interaction and skill development, enhancing self-esteem and overall well-being. Additionally, support groups tailored to specific mental health conditions offer a platform for individuals facing similar challenges to connect, share coping strategies, and offer encouragement.

The integration of mental health services with primary healthcare, coupled with the rise of teletherapy and online support platforms, has transformed the landscape of mental healthcare, making it more accessible and inclusive. Moreover, the vital role played by communities and social support networks cannot be overstated. By fostering a sense of belonging and understanding, these networks create environments where individuals can thrive, emphasizing the importance of a holistic, community-based approach to mental health promotion and support.

Education and Awareness:

Mental health education is a cornerstone in fostering understanding and empathy within societies. In schools, incorporating mental health education equips students with essential knowledge about emotions, stress management, and seeking help when needed. It not only reduces stigma but also encourages an open dialogue about mental well-being. In workplaces, providing employees with mental health resources and training promotes a supportive environment where individuals can discuss their challenges without fear of judgement. Community-based mental health education initiatives further extend these efforts, ensuring that everyone, regardless of age or background, is aware of the importance of mental health.

Successful mental health awareness campaigns serve as powerful agents of change. They utilise various media platforms, community events, and social media to reach diverse audiences. These campaigns destigmatize mental health issues, encouraging open conversations and challenging misconceptions. Real-life stories of resilience and recovery shared through these campaigns inspire others, fostering a sense of hope and solidarity within communities. Such initiatives break down barriers, encouraging individuals to seek help and support when facing mental health challenges.

The 21st century brings with it a heightened awareness of the critical importance of mental health. It is not merely the absence of mental challenges but a state of well-being where individuals can cope with life's challenges, work productively, and contribute meaningfully to society. This understanding underscores the need for comprehensive mental health education, accessible support services, and destigmatization efforts.

It is vital for individuals to prioritise their mental health, acknowledging that seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. By supporting initiatives that promote mental well-being, communities can create nurturing environments where individuals thrive emotionally, psychologically, and socially. Together, we can break the barriers surrounding mental health, fostering understanding, compassion, and acceptance.





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Mental health challenges of young football players

In the world of sports, the physical aspects of athletes' well-being have long been in the spotlight. However, an equally crucial, yet often overlooked, dimension of an athlete's health is their mental well-being. This research initiative delves into the mental health challenges faced by young football players, shedding light on a subject that demands our attention.

In the high-stakes, competitive arena of football, young players often grapple with immense pressure, self-doubt, and anxiety, not to mention the personal challenges that come with adolescence. This research seeks to understand how these pressures manifest in the minds of young footballers, exploring their perceptions, experiences, and coping mechanisms. Moreover, it doesn't stop there; we've also reached out to football coaches to gain their invaluable insights into the mental health challenges faced by young players under their guidance.

By giving voice to these young athletes and their mentors, we aim to break the stigma surrounding mental health in sports. This study will provide insights that can guide support systems, coaching methods, and educational programs to better address the mental well-being of young football players. In doing so, we hope to foster a healthier, more supportive environment for the football stars of tomorrow.



Importance of addressing mental health challenges

Addressing mental health challenges is of paramount importance in the realm of sports, including football, for several compelling reasons. First and foremost, mental health directly impacts an athlete's overall well-being and performance. Young football players, like athletes in other sports, face immense pressure, competition, and expectations, which can lead to stress, anxiety, and various mental health challenges. Ignoring or neglecting these issues can result in a decline in an athlete's physical and psychological health, affecting their ability to perform at their best.

Addressing mental health challenges is crucial for creating a safe, supportive, and inclusive sports environment. By openly discussing and acknowledging mental health concerns, athletes, coaches, and sports organisations can break the stigma surrounding mental health and encourage individuals to seek help when needed. This fosters a sense of trust, teamwork, and solidarity within the sports community, enabling athletes to access the necessary resources and support to cope with their mental health challenges effectively.

Athletes are not just competitors; they are role models for countless young fans who look up to them. When athletes, especially those in high-profile sports like football, prioritize and address mental health, they set a positive example for their fans and promote mental health awareness in society as a whole. By recognizing and addressing mental health challenges, we not only safeguard the well-being of athletes but also contribute to a healthier, more compassionate, and resilient sports culture.

#SMS research - Players' perspective

The data obtained through research on young football players' perceptions of mental health challenges is invaluable in several respects. Firstly, it provides critical insights into the mental well-being of these athletes, shedding light on the specific challenges they face and the factors that may contribute to mental health issues. This information allows sports organizations, coaches, and support staff to tailor their programs and interventions to address the unique needs of young football players effectively.

The research findings serve as a powerful advocacy tool to raise awareness about the importance of mental health in sports. When backed by empirical data, it becomes harder to ignore or downplay mental health concerns in the football community. This research helps dismantle the stigma surrounding mental health issues and encourages open conversations, reducing the isolation often experienced by athletes facing these challenges.

The data revealed acts as a catalyst for positive change, driving evidence-based policies and practices within football organizations. It empowers stakeholders to implement mental health support systems, education initiatives, and intervention strategies that can enhance the overall well-being and performance of young football players. The information revealed contributes to the creation of a healthier, more supportive, and mentally resilient environment for young athletes in football and beyond.



#SMS survey results

The project team conducted a brief survey involving 190 football players aged 13 to 18. This survey is an integral component of the "Strong Minds for Success" project, serving multiple vital purposes. Firstly, it allows us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the mental health challenges faced by young athletes. This understanding is crucial because it forms the basis for tailored interventions and support mechanism.

Additionally, the survey provides a baseline of data that helps us assess the mental health status of young athletes at the project's inception. Over time, this baseline will enable us to measure the effectiveness of our interventions and track improvements.

By involving athletes in the survey, we foster their engagement and participation in the project. This inclusivity ensures that our initiatives are informed by the perspectives and needs of those directly affected.

Furthermore, the survey helps us allocate resources efficiently, directing efforts toward areas of greatest need. It also facilitates a data-driven, evidence-based approach to mental health support.

Conducting this survey reflects our ethical responsibility to prioritize the mental well-being of young athletes. It underscores our commitment to their overall health and development.

Ultimately, the survey is a foundational step toward establishing a culture of mental health awareness and support within sports organizations. It contributes to the long-term goal of enhancing the mental well-being and overall quality of life of young athletes, which, in turn, can positively impact their athletic performance and personal growth.

The data collected is exclusively intended for research purposes and the creation of high-quality resources to enhance the mental well-being of young players.

1. Your country of residence?

The survey data regarding the respondents' country of residence reveals a distribution that provides insights into the geographic diversity of the participants. The largest group of respondents, comprising nearly 44,74% of the total, hails from Bulgaria. This suggests that a significant portion of the survey's participants resides in Bulgaria, indicating a potentially strong interest or awareness in mental health among young football players in the country. Slovenia is the second most represented country among the respondents, with approximately 27,3% of participants residing there. Slovenia is known for its rich culture and affinity for team sports, and this is reflected in the survey's data. Italy, with just over 27,89% of respondents residing there, makes up the third group. This suggests that Italy also has a notable representation in the survey, indicating that concerns related to mental health are not confined to a single region but are relevant to respondents from multiple countries.

The diversity in respondents' countries of residence underscores the global nature of the issue of mental health education among young football players. It's important to note that this challenge is a concern that transcends geographical boundaries, and addressing it effectively requires a comprehensive approach that considers the perspectives and experiences of individuals from various regions. This data highlights the need for international collaboration and the exchange of best practices to improve mental health and promote confidence among young footballers worldwide. (Fig. 1)

Country of residence:

Number of responses: 190

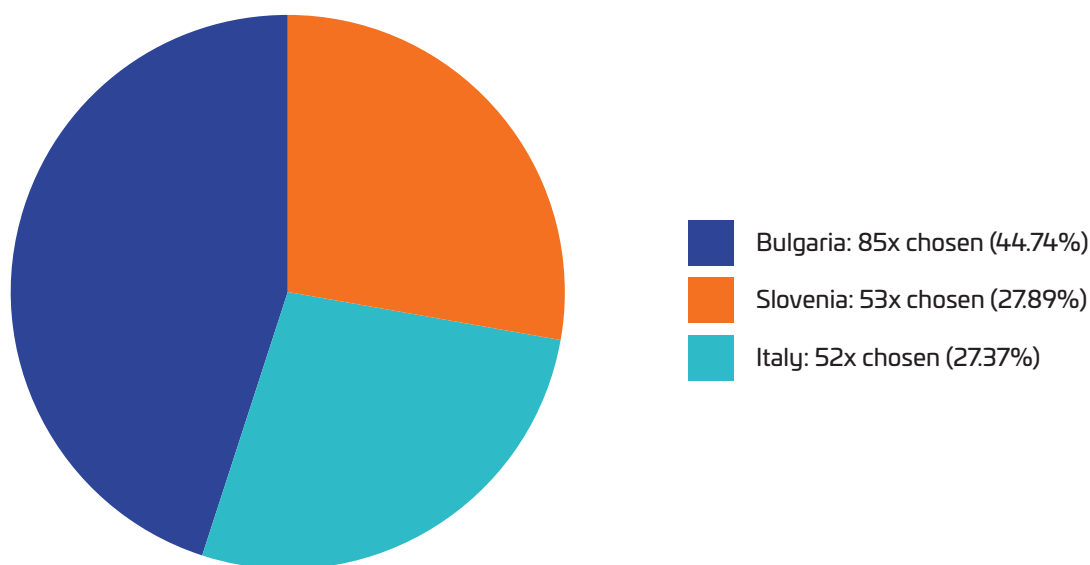


Figure 1

2. What is your current residence?

The responses to the question about the current residence of the participants reveal a distribution across various types of locations:

- Capital City (25.26%): A quarter of the respondents indicated that they reside in a capital city. Capital cities typically offer urban amenities, access to a wide range of services, and diverse opportunities. This suggests a substantial representation of individuals from major urban centres;

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- Big City (13.16%): A smaller percentage, around 13%, identified themselves as residing in big cities. Big cities also offer urban advantages but may vary in size and available resources compared to capital cities;
- Small Town (27.37%): More than a quarter of the participants stated that they live in small towns. Small towns often have a close-knit community, a slower pace of life, and may lack some of the urban features found in larger cities;
- A Village (34.21%): The largest percentage of respondents, approximately 34%, reported living in villages. Villages typically represent rural or countryside settings with a smaller population and fewer urban amenities.

These responses highlight the diversity of residence among the survey participants, encompassing urban, suburban, and rural environments. Such diversity can influence various aspects of individuals' lives, including access to resources, community dynamics, and overall lifestyle. Understanding the residence distribution can be valuable when considering regional differences and tailoring mental health initiatives to meet the specific needs of different community types. (Fig. 2)

Current residence:

Number of responses: 190

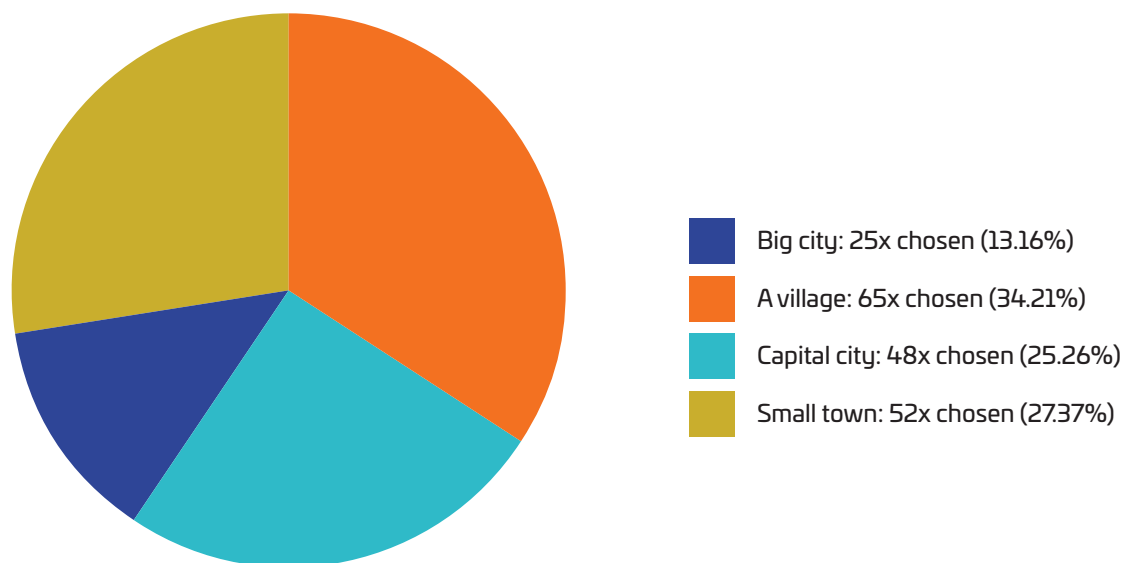


Figure 2

3. How old are you?

The data concerning the ages of respondents in the "Strong Mind for Success - Mind Matters: Exploring Mental Health in Young" project reveals a diverse range of participant age groups, contributing to a comprehensive exploration of mental health in young individuals.

- The age group of 17 stands out as the most prominent among the respondents, comprising approximately 22.22% of the participants. This suggests a strong interest in mental health matters among individuals in the late teenage years, perhaps driven by personal experiences or a desire to support their peers;
- Closely following are the age groups of 13, 14, and 15, each representing around 18.52%, 16.4%, and 16.4%, respectively. This demonstrates active engagement in the project from adolescents in the early to mid-teen years, highlighting their interest in understanding and addressing mental health issues;

- The age group of 16, accounting for about 15.34%, further reinforces the participation of young individuals who are approaching adulthood and might have unique insights into the challenges faced by their age group;
- Interestingly, there is also representation from individuals who are 18 years old, with approximately 11.11% of the respondents. This indicates that young adults are actively involved in exploring mental health topics among the youth.

The distribution of ages across these different groups underscores the multi-generational interest and commitment to addressing mental health concerns in young individuals. It's vital to have input from both adolescents and young adults, as well as older participants, to develop effective strategies for promoting mental well-being in young people. The diversity of perspectives across these age groups enriches the project's insights and potential solutions for supporting the mental health of the youth. (Fig. 3)

How old are you:

Number of responses: 190

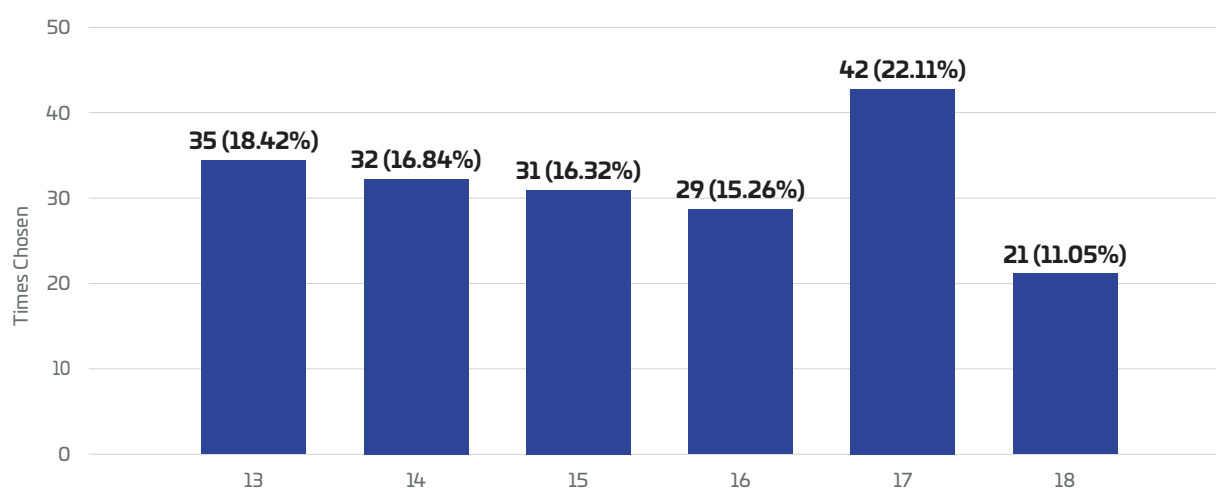


Figure 3

4. How long have you been playing soccer (years)?

The participants' responses to the question about how long they have been playing soccer provide insights into the level of experience within this sport:

- Mean (Average): 6.96 Years: On average, the respondents have been involved in soccer for approximately 6.96 years. This indicates a considerable level of experience within the sport;
- Standard Deviation (Range): 3.59 to 10.33 Years: The standard deviation, ranging from 3.59 to 10.33 years, reveals the spread of experience levels among the participants. While the mean indicates the average experience, the range suggests that there is a diversity of experiences, with some individuals having significantly more or less experience than the mean.

This data reflects a range of soccer experience levels among the survey participants, which can be valuable for understanding the diversity in skill development, familiarity with the sport's challenges, and the potential influence of experience on mental health in young athletes. (Fig. 4)



How long have you been playing soccer (years):

Number of responses: 190

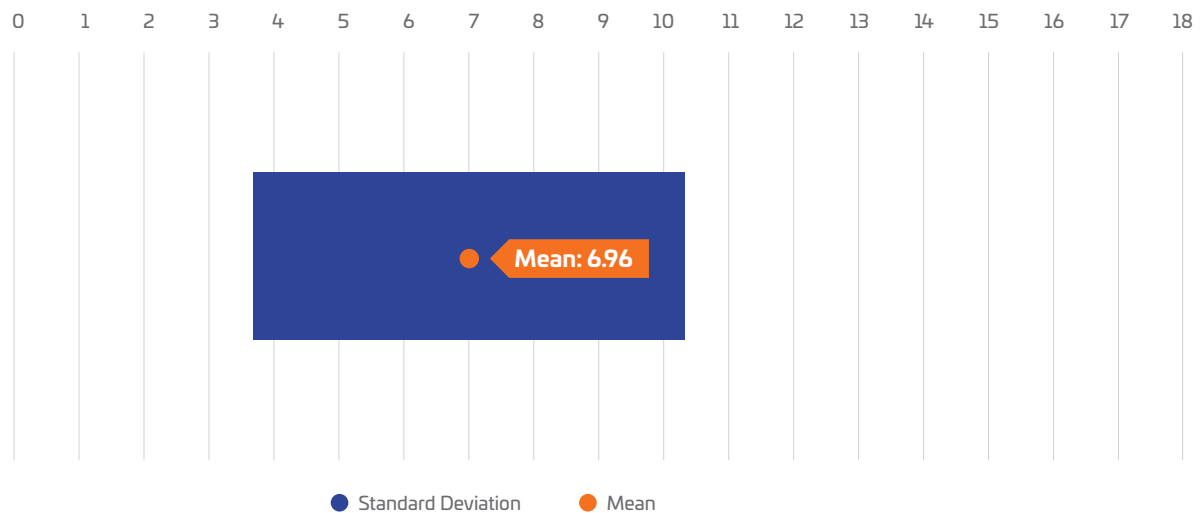


Figure 4

The respondents' answers regarding the number of years they have been playing soccer reveal interesting patterns in terms of their soccer experience:

- **Varied Experience Levels:** The data shows that participants have a wide range of experience in soccer, ranging from 1 to 14 years. This suggests that the survey includes individuals who are relatively new to the sport as well as those with more extensive soccer backgrounds.
- **Highest Frequencies:** The highest frequencies are observed in the 7-year (16.32%) and 6-year (11.58%) experience categories. This indicates that a substantial portion of respondents has been actively involved in soccer for either 6 or 7 years.
- **Diverse Experience:** The distribution of responses across various experience levels illustrates the diversity of players' backgrounds. Some have been playing for only a few years (e.g., 1 to 4 years), while others have a longer history in the sport (e.g., 8 to 14 years).
- **Balanced Spread:** Overall, the distribution of responses appears relatively balanced, with no single experience level dominating the data. This suggests a well-rounded representation of soccer experience among the survey participants.

Understanding the range of experience levels is important when examining the potential relationship between soccer experience and mental health in young athletes. Different experience levels may influence how athletes perceive and manage mental health challenges, making this diversity a valuable aspect of the survey data. (Fig. 5)

How long have you been playing soccer (years):

Number of responses: 190

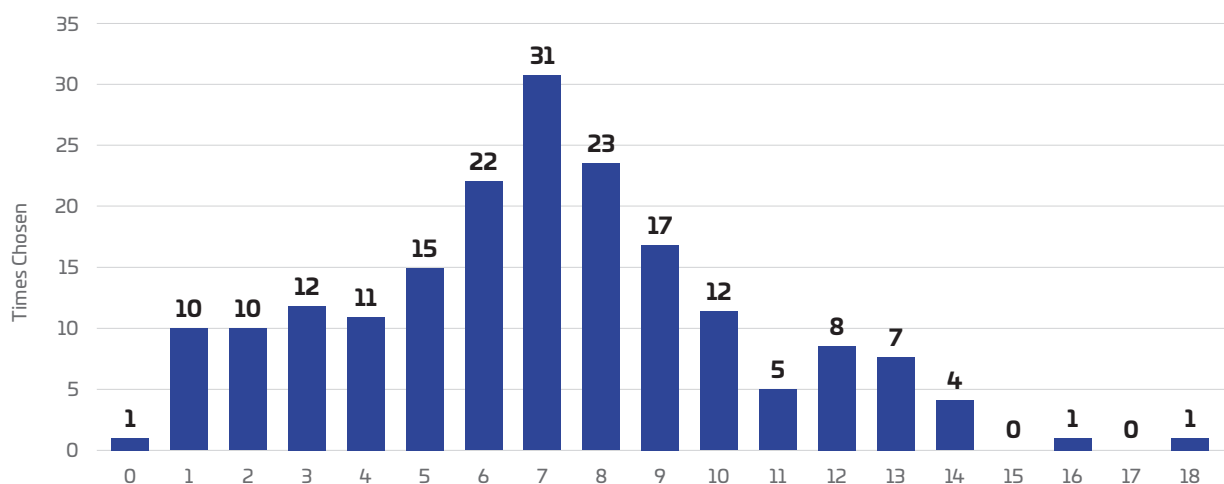


Figure 5

5. Have you ever participated in an official football championship?

The responses to the question about whether respondents have ever participated in an official football championship reveal the following insights:

- **High Participation Rate:** A significant majority of the respondents, accounting for 83.68%, have participated in official football championships. This indicates a strong involvement in competitive football at the championship level among the surveyed individuals;
- **Limited Non-Participants:** While the majority have taken part in football championships, there is still a notable minority (16.32%) who have not. This suggests that some respondents may primarily engage in football at a non-competitive or recreational level, or they may be relatively new to the sport;
- **Competitive Experience:** The high participation rate in official championships indicates that the survey likely includes individuals with substantial competitive football experience. This experience could have implications for how athletes perceive and manage their mental health, as competitive environments often come with added pressures and stressors.

Understanding the prevalence of participation in official football championships is essential when exploring the relationship between competitive sports and mental health in young athletes. The data indicates that a large portion of respondents have first-hand experience in this context, which could provide valuable insights into their mental health challenges and coping strategies within competitive football settings. (Fig. 6)



Have you ever participated in an official football championship:

Number of responses: 190

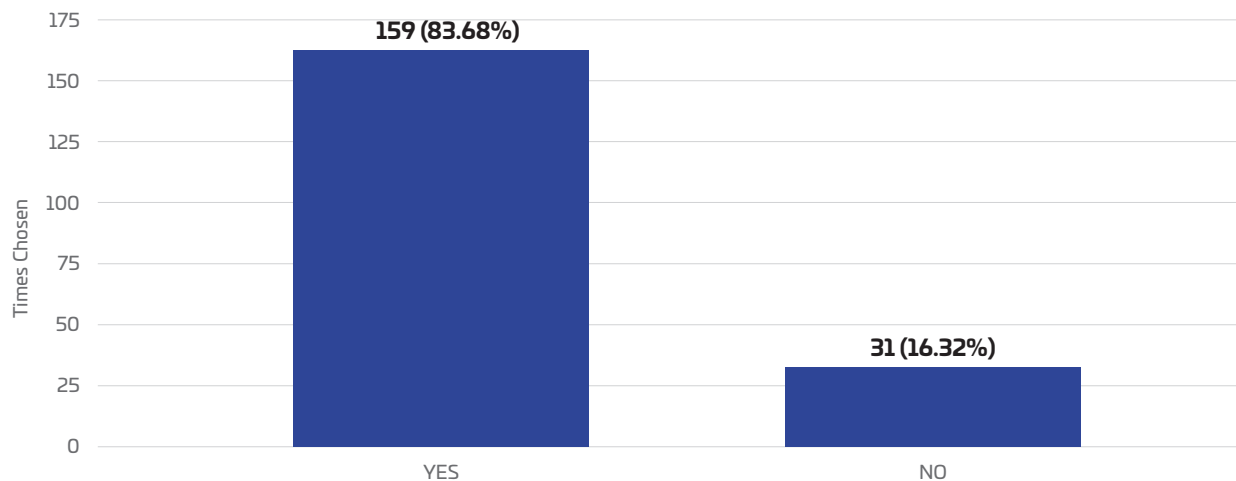


Figure 6

6. If yes, what is the highest-level event you have participated in:

The responses to the question regarding the highest level of football events in which respondents have participated provide insights into the competitive experience of the surveyed individuals:

- **Local Level Participation:** A substantial portion of respondents (27.67%) reported participating in football events at the local level. This suggests that many respondents have experience with grassroots or community-level football competitions;
- **Regional Level Engagement:** Nearly one-third of the respondents (30.82%) have participated in football events at the regional level. This indicates a step up in terms of competition, as regional events often involve teams from a broader geographic area;
- **National Level Competitors:** A significant number of respondents (28.93%) have taken part in national-level football events. Competing at the national level implies a high level of skill and achievement, as these events involve representing one's country or competing against the best teams and players from across the nation;
- **International Level Representation:** A notable proportion (12.58%) of respondents reported participating in international-level football events. This is a remarkable achievement, signifying that these individuals have represented their country on the global stage or competed against international teams.

The distribution of participation levels provides valuable context for understanding the competitive backgrounds of the surveyed individuals. It indicates a diverse range of experiences, from local grassroots competitions to international representation, which may influence how athletes perceive and manage their mental health within different competitive contexts. (Fig.7)

If yes, what is the highest level event you have participated in:

Number of responses: 159

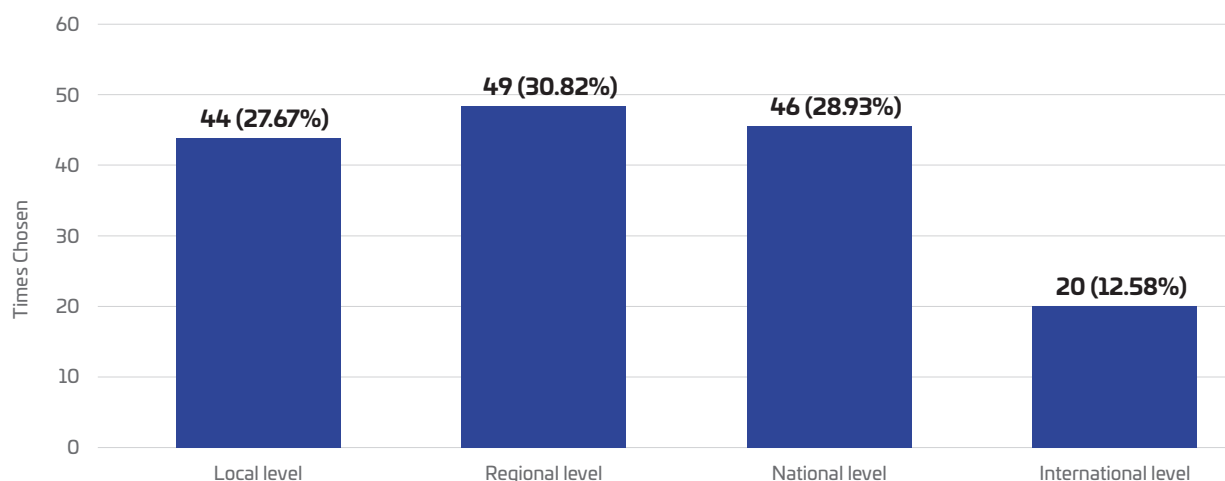


Figure 7

7. Are you familiar with the term mental health?

The responses to the question about familiarity with the term "mental health" reveal the level of awareness among the surveyed individuals:

- **Familiarity with Mental Health:** A significant majority of respondents (84.21%) indicated that they are familiar with the term "mental health." This high level of awareness suggests that the concept of mental health is widely recognized and understood within the surveyed population;
- **Limited Familiarity:** However, a notable minority (15.79%) of respondents reported not being familiar with the term "mental health." While this percentage is relatively small, it highlights that there is still a portion of individuals within the surveyed group who may not have a clear understanding of mental health.

Overall, the majority of respondents are aware of the term "mental health," which is a positive indicator for addressing mental health-related issues and providing support and education in this area. However, it also underscores the importance of promoting mental health literacy and awareness among those who may not be familiar with the concept. (Fig. 8)



Are you familiar with the term mental health:

Number of responses: 190

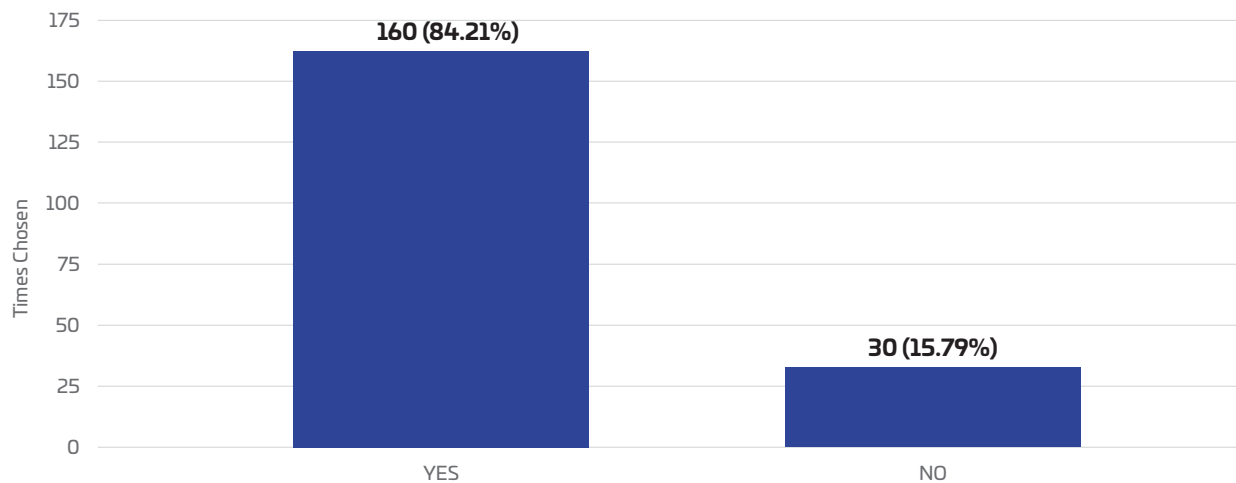


Figure 8

8. What is your understanding of mental health?

The responses to the question about the understanding of mental health reflect various perceptions within the surveyed group:

- **Emotional Well-being:** A portion of respondents (22.63%) associated mental health primarily with emotional well-being. This suggests that they view mental health as closely tied to their emotional state, emphasizing feelings and emotional stability as key components;
- **Mental Well-being:** A significant majority (40.53%) indicated that they understand mental health as related to mental well-being. This interpretation emphasizes cognitive and psychological aspects, including thoughts, feelings, and overall mental functioning;
- **Social Welfare:** A small percentage (3.68%) of respondents associated mental health with social welfare. This suggests that they may perceive mental health as related to societal or community well-being, indicating a broader perspective on its impact;
- **All of the Above:** Nearly half of the respondents (48.42%) selected "All of the above." This choice implies that they recognize mental health as encompassing emotional well-being, mental well-being, and social welfare, highlighting a comprehensive understanding of mental health as a multidimensional concept;
- **None of the Above:** A very small minority (3.16%) chose "None of the above." This suggests that a few respondents did not associate mental health with any of the provided options, indicating potential variations in their understanding or the need for further clarification. (Fig. 9)

What is your understanding of mental health:

Number of responses: 190

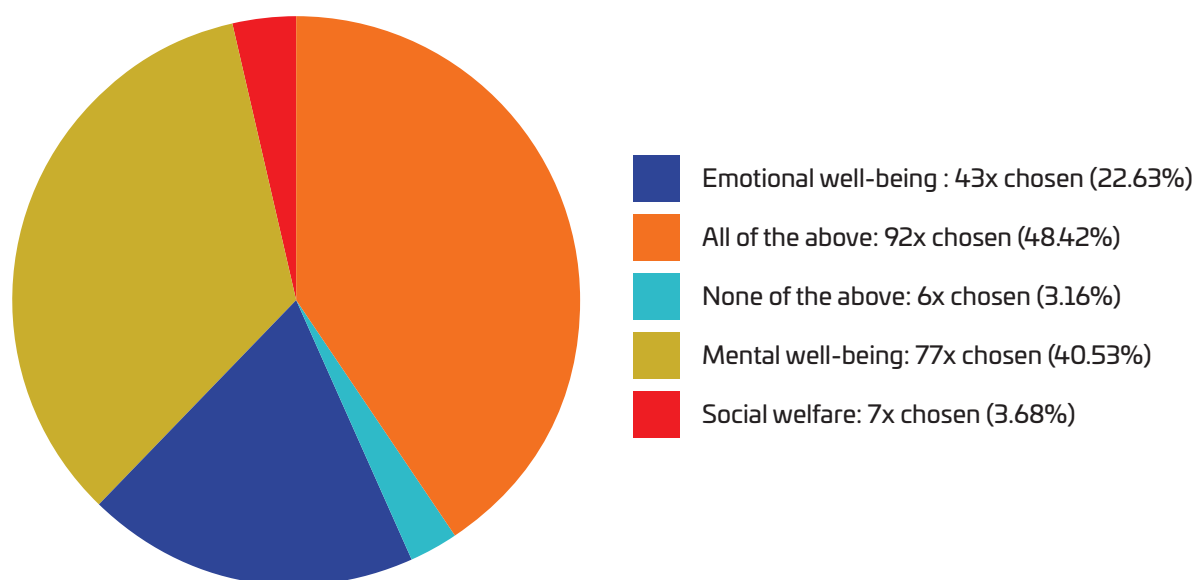


Figure 9

The responses to the question about the understanding of mental health in the context of the "Strong Mind for Success - Mind Matters: Exploring Mental Health in Young" project vary among the surveyed countries, shedding light on different perceptions and awareness levels regarding mental health.

In Bulgaria, the majority of respondents (48.19%) associate mental health with "Mental Well-being." A significant portion (27.71%) relates it to "Emotional Well-being." Furthermore, 38.55% of Bulgarian respondents believe that mental health encompasses "All of the above," indicating a comprehensive understanding that includes emotional and mental well-being. Only a small percentage (3.61%) selected "None of the above," suggesting that most respondents in Bulgaria have some level of understanding regarding mental health.

In Italy, a large majority (66.04%) of respondents believe that mental health encompasses "All listed" aspects, indicating a comprehensive understanding that includes emotional and mental well-being. A smaller percentage (20.75%) associates it with both "Emotional well-being" and "Mental Well-being." A small fraction (3.77%) chose "None of the above," suggesting that most Italian respondents recognize the importance of multiple aspects in defining mental health.

In Slovenia, a significant portion of respondents (47.17%) associates mental health with "Mental well-being." A smaller but still notable percentage (16.98%) relates it to "Emotional well-being." Additionally, 5.66% of Slovenian respondents link mental health to "Social Welfare." A substantial 47.17% of Slovenian respondents believe that mental health includes "All listed" aspects. Only 1.89% selected "None of the above," indicating that Slovenian respondents, like their counterparts in Bulgaria and Italy, generally possess an understanding of mental health, albeit with different emphases.

Overall, the data reveals that respondents from all three countries generally have a nuanced understanding of mental health. They often recognize it as encompassing both emotional and mental well-being. Additionally, a significant portion of respondents from each country believes that mental health includes various aspects. These findings indicate a growing awareness of the multidimensional nature of mental health and its importance in overall well-being.

9. What are the main types of mental health?

The respondents in the "Strong Mind for Success - Mind Matters: Exploring Mental Health in Young" project were asked to identify the main types of mental health. Here are the key findings based on their responses:

- **Mood Disorders (Depression or Bipolar Disorder):** A significant portion of respondents (31.58%) recognized mood disorders, such as depression or bipolar disorder, as a primary category of mental health conditions. This suggests an awareness of conditions characterized by fluctuations in mood and emotions;
- **Anxiety:** Nearly one-fifth of the respondents (19.47%) identified anxiety as a main type of mental health condition. This highlights the recognition of anxiety disorders, which encompass a range of conditions characterized by excessive worry, fear, and nervousness;
- **Personality Disorders:** A substantial portion (16.32%) of respondents acknowledged personality disorders as a category of mental health conditions. This reflects an understanding of conditions related to ingrained patterns of behaviour, cognition, and inner experience;
- **Mental Disorders (Schizophrenia):** A notable proportion (13.16%) recognized mental disorders like schizophrenia as a type of mental health condition. This signifies an awareness of conditions that may involve altered thinking, perception, and behaviours;
- **All of the Above:** A significant percentage (43.68%) selected "All of the above." This suggests that many respondents view mental health as a complex field encompassing a variety of conditions, including mood disorders, anxiety, personality disorders, and mental disorders like schizophrenia;
- **None of the Above:** A minority (12.63%) indicated "None of the above." This implies that some respondents did not associate mental health with any of the provided options, which could indicate a need for further education or clarification regarding mental health conditions.

Overall, the responses reflect a reasonable level of awareness regarding different types of mental health conditions. Recognizing mood disorders, anxiety, personality disorders, and mental disorders indicates a well-rounded understanding of the diverse challenges individuals may face in the realm of mental health. (Fig. 10)



What are the main types of mental health:

Number of responses: 190

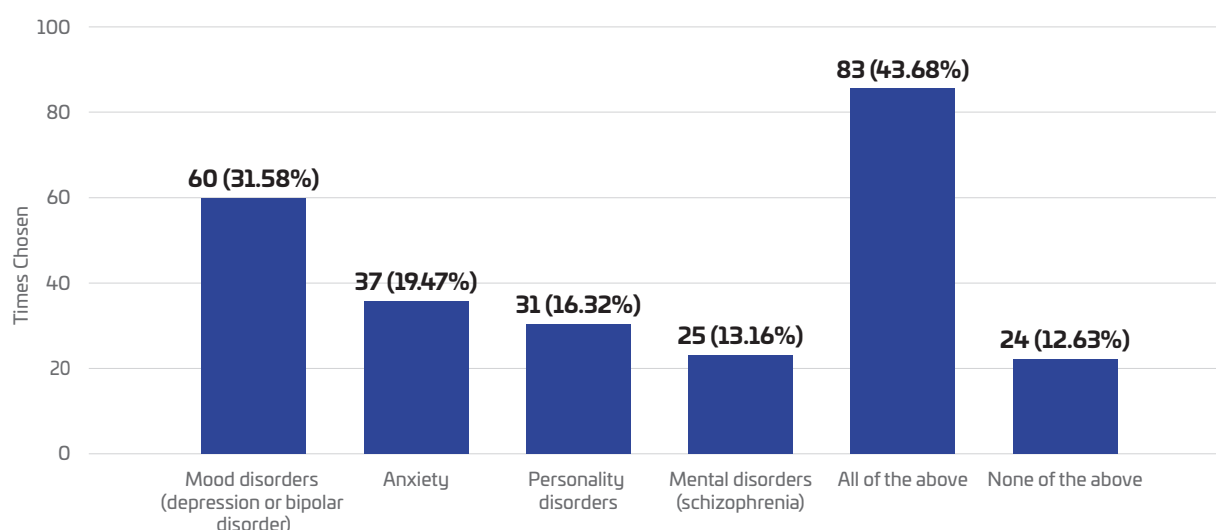


Figure 10

10. Have you experienced any of the following feelings/emotions?

The respondents in the "Strong Mind for Success - Mind Matters: Exploring Mental Health in Young" project were asked if they had experienced various feelings and emotions. Here are the key findings based on their responses:

- **Stress:** A majority of respondents (63.16%) indicated experiencing stress. Stress is a common emotional response to various life challenges, and its prevalence highlights the need to address stress management;
- **Sadness:** An even higher percentage (70.53%) reported experiencing sadness. Sadness can be a normal emotional response to life's ups and downs, but persistent or severe sadness may be indicative of underlying concerns like depression;
- **Panic Attacks:** A notable portion (16.84%) disclosed experiencing panic attacks. These sudden and intense episodes of fear or distress can be distressing and may warrant attention from mental health professionals;
- **Performance Anxiety:** Performance anxiety was reported by a significant majority (64.21%) of respondents. This type of anxiety often occurs in competitive situations, such as sports, and can impact an individual's ability to perform at their best;
- **Eating Disorders:** A substantial number (14.74%) mentioned experiencing eating disorders. Eating disorders involve complex relationships with food and body image, and addressing them often requires specialized treatment;
- **Dealing with Win/Loss:** A significant percentage (40%) indicated dealing with the emotions surrounding both winning and losing in sports. These emotions can impact an athlete's mental well-being and performance;
- **Depression:** Over one-eighth (13.68%) admitted to experiencing depression. Depression is a serious mental health condition that can significantly affect an individual's quality of life and functioning;



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- ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder): A smaller percentage (6.32%) mentioned ADHD. This neurodevelopmental disorder can affect attention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity and may require professional evaluation;
- Sleep Disorders: Almost a quarter (23.16%) reported experiencing sleep disorders. Sleep is crucial for overall well-being, and sleep disorders can have detrimental effects on mental health;
- Social Anxiety Disorder: Around one-eighth (11.58%) indicated experiencing social anxiety disorder. This type of anxiety is related to social interactions and can impact an individual's ability to engage in social activities;
- Other: A few respondents (2.11%) mentioned other specific feelings or emotions not covered in the provided options. These unique experiences could encompass a wide range of mental health challenges. (Fig. 11)

What are the main types of mental health:
Number of responses: 190

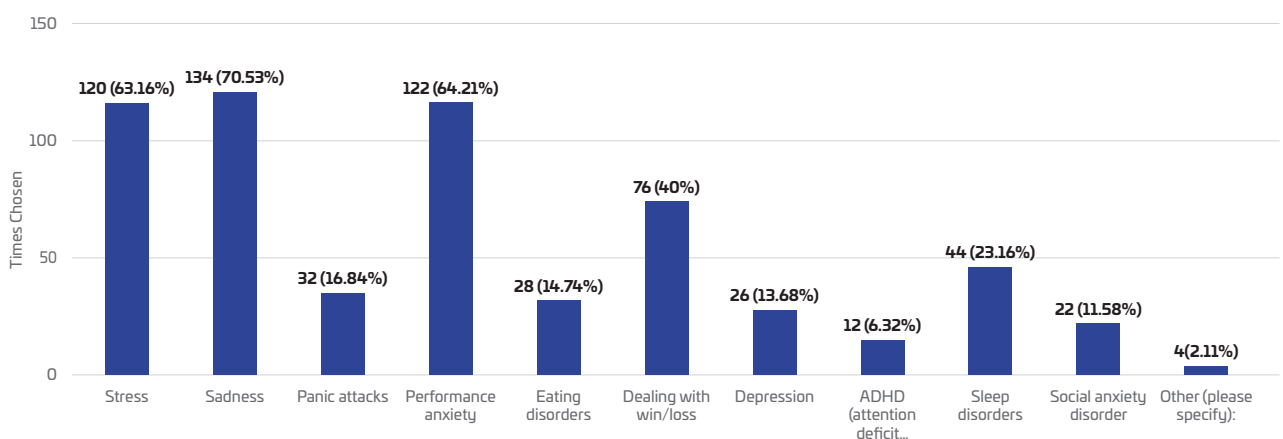


Figure 11

These findings underscore the prevalence of various emotional experiences among the respondents. It is important to recognize and address these feelings and emotions, as they can significantly impact mental health and overall well-being. Additionally, these responses highlight the importance of promoting mental health awareness and providing support for individuals experiencing such emotions and conditions.

11. How often have you had these feelings?

The respondents in the "Strong Mind for Success - Mind Matters: Exploring Mental Health in Young" project were asked how often they had experienced various feelings and emotions. Here are the key findings based on their responses:

- **Every Day (6.84%):** A small percentage of respondents reported experiencing these feelings every day. This suggests that for a minority, these emotions are persistent and may require ongoing attention and support;
- **Every Week (11.05%):** Similarly, a modest portion mentioned experiencing these emotions every week. This frequency indicates that these feelings are recurrent and may impact their weekly activities;
- **Monthly (13.68%):** Around one-eighth of respondents indicated experiencing these feelings on a monthly basis. This periodicity suggests that these emotions are not constant but still have a notable presence in their lives;
- **Occasionally (64.74%):** The majority of respondents (64.74%) reported experiencing these feelings occasionally. This suggests that these emotions are not rare occurrences but are part of their lives intermittently;
- **Never (3.68%):** A small percentage mentioned never experiencing these feelings. While this group is the smallest, it's essential to acknowledge that not everyone encounters these emotions.

These findings demonstrate that for most respondents, these feelings and emotions are not isolated incidents but are experienced with varying frequencies. The prevalence of occasional experiences underscores the need for strategies and resources to support young individuals in managing and coping with these emotions effectively. The data also highlight the diversity in the frequency of these emotions among the respondents. While some individuals face them daily or weekly, others encounter them less frequently. It is crucial to recognize that experiencing such emotions is a normal part of the human experience, and seeking support and coping strategies can be beneficial for individuals dealing with these feelings, regardless of their frequency. (Fig. 12)

How often have you had these feelings?

Number of responses: 190

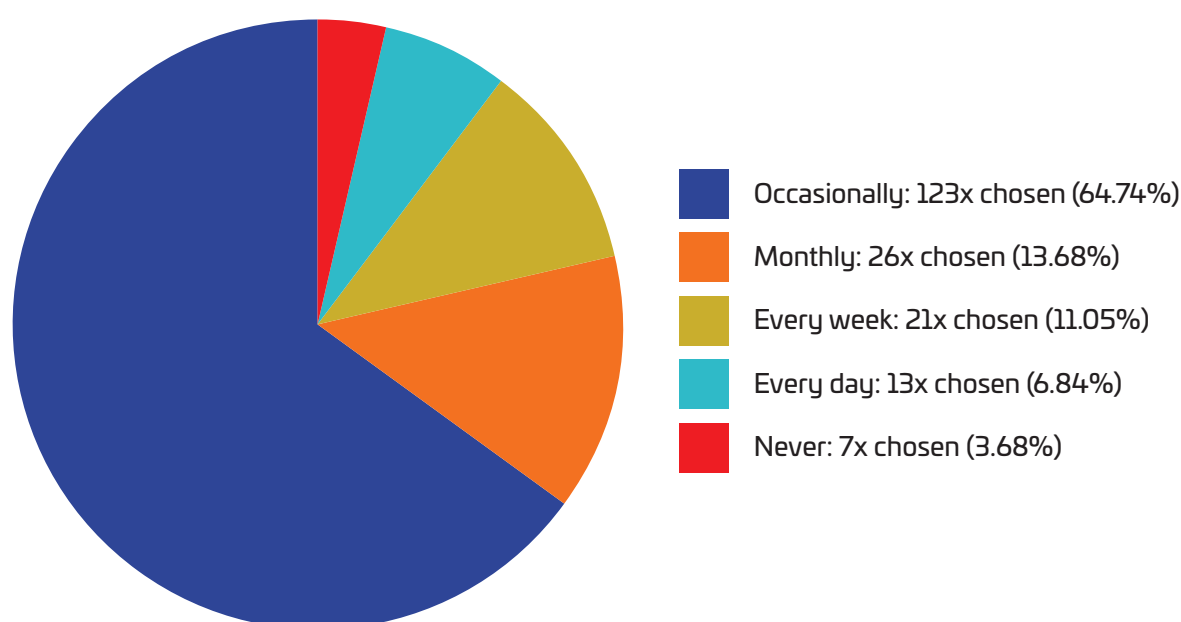


Figure 12

12. If yes, did you manage to overcome them?

Among the respondents who reported experiencing feelings and emotions related to mental health challenges, a significant majority indicated that they were able to overcome these challenges:

- Yes (89.07%): An overwhelming majority of respondents, nearly nine out of ten, reported successfully overcoming these feelings and emotions. This suggests that many young individuals have effective coping strategies or access to support systems to address these challenges;
- No (10.93%): A smaller percentage, around one-tenth of respondents, mentioned that they were unable to overcome these feelings and emotions. While this group is relatively small, it highlights that some individuals may require additional assistance or resources to manage their mental health effectively.

These findings indicate that a substantial portion of young athletes have the resilience and resources to address mental health challenges successfully. However, it's essential to continue promoting mental health awareness and support to ensure that all individuals receive the help they need when facing such difficulties. (Fig. 13)

If yes, did you manage to overcome them:

Number of responses: 183

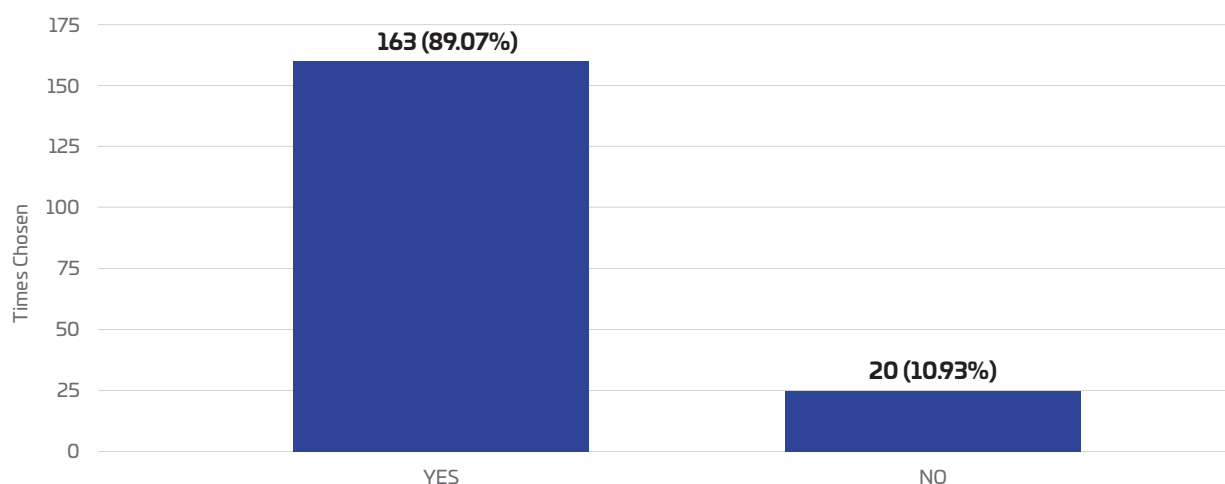


Figure 13

13. Please share with us your approach to overcoming challenging mental health moments

The responses to the question regarding approaches to overcoming challenging mental health moments provide valuable insights into how these young athletes cope with difficulties. A common theme among the responses is the importance of seeking support and talking to others. Many participants mention talking to friends, coaches, parents, and psychologists as their preferred strategies. This highlights the significance of having a support system and open communication channels for addressing mental health issues. Engagement in physical activities, particularly playing football, is another prevalent coping mechanism. Several respondents mention that they use sports as a way to release pent-up emotions and have fun, emphasizing the positive impact of physical activity on mental well-being.

Overall, the responses reflect a variety of coping strategies, emphasizing the importance of seeking support, engaging in physical activities, and practicing self-awareness and self-control in managing mental health challenges. These insights can inform mental health initiatives for young athletes, highlighting the need for a holistic approach that addresses both physical and emotional well-being. (Fig. 14)



14. Were these cases directly related to your football performance/participation?

- Yes (49.18%): Nearly half of the respondents (approximately 49.18%) indicated that their mental health challenges were directly linked to their football performance or participation. This suggests that the pressures and demands of football may contribute to mental health issues for a significant portion of young athletes;
- No (26.23%): A smaller percentage (about 26.23%) stated that their mental health challenges were not related to their football involvement. This group suggests that other factors outside of football may have been responsible for their mental health issues;

- Not sure/Prefer not to answer (24.59%): Around a quarter of the respondents (approximately 24.59%) either were unsure or chose not to provide an answer regarding the connection between their mental health challenges and football participation. This may indicate uncertainty or a lack of awareness of the factors influencing their mental health.

These findings highlight the need for mental health support and awareness within the context of youth football, as a significant portion of young athletes perceive a direct link between their mental health and their participation in the sport. Additionally, there may be underlying mental health challenges that are not directly related to football but still impact these athletes, emphasizing the importance of holistic mental health care. The data emphasize that a substantial number of young individuals in football do connect their emotional experiences to their performance in the sport. This underscores the importance of addressing mental health and emotional well-being within the context of sports, as it can have a direct impact on the lives of young athletes. Additionally, it's essential to provide support and resources to those who may be struggling with these challenges. (Fig. 15)

Were these cases directly related to your football performance/participation:

Number of responses: 183

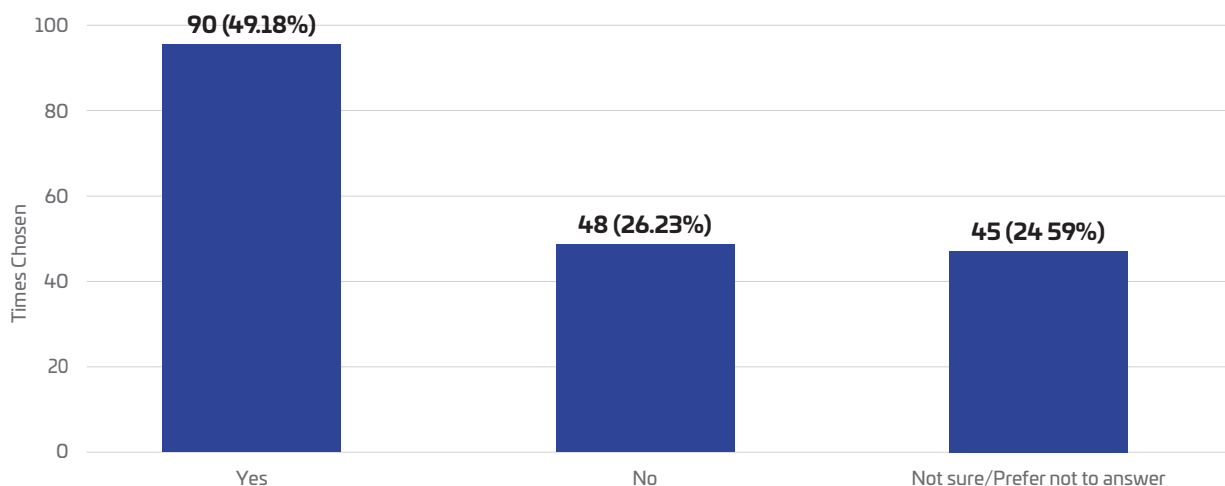


Figure 15

15. Do you think any of the following aspects of overcoming mental health challenges could help?

The means of the responses to the question about the aspects of overcoming mental health challenges provide insights into how young athletes perceive various factors that could help improve their mental well-being:

- Connecting with other people (69.42): This mean suggests that young athletes generally believe that connecting with others is important for overcoming mental health challenges. Building a support network and having social connections are seen as valuable in addressing mental well-being;
- Good relationships are important to your mental well-being (80.68): The high mean for the importance of good relationships emphasizes that young athletes recognize the significance of healthy relationships in maintaining good mental health. Positive social interactions and connections are viewed as vital;

- Being physically active helps your fitness and health (85.57): Young athletes strongly believe in the connection between physical activity and mental well-being. They acknowledge that staying physically active not only benefits their fitness and health but also contributes positively to their mental state;
- To learn new skills (74.71): The mean for learning new skills indicates that young athletes see skill development as a valuable strategy for improving their mental health. Acquiring new abilities may provide a sense of achievement and purpose;
- Be useful to the people around you (71.45): Young athletes consider being useful to others as a factor that can contribute to their mental well-being. Helping others may boost their self-esteem and overall mental health;
- To pay attention to the present moment (mindfulness) (75.38): The mean for mindfulness suggests that many young athletes see the practice of staying mindful and focusing on the present moment as a beneficial approach to addressing mental health challenges. Mindfulness techniques can help reduce stress and anxiety;
- Seek support from your friends and family (80.44): The high mean for seeking support from friends and family underscores the importance of a strong support system. Young athletes recognize that turning to loved ones for support can positively impact their mental well-being;
- To achieve skills to help you overcome challenges in moments of vulnerability (71.34): This mean indicates that young athletes believe in the significance of acquiring skills to cope with challenges during vulnerable moments. Building resilience and problem-solving skills are valued;
- To help you share your challenges with your coach (67.23): While slightly lower than some other factors, the mean for sharing challenges with a coach still suggests that young athletes see their coaches as potential sources of support for addressing mental health challenges. Open communication with coaches is considered important. (Fig. 16)

Do you think any of the following aspects of overcoming mental health challenges could help (Means)?

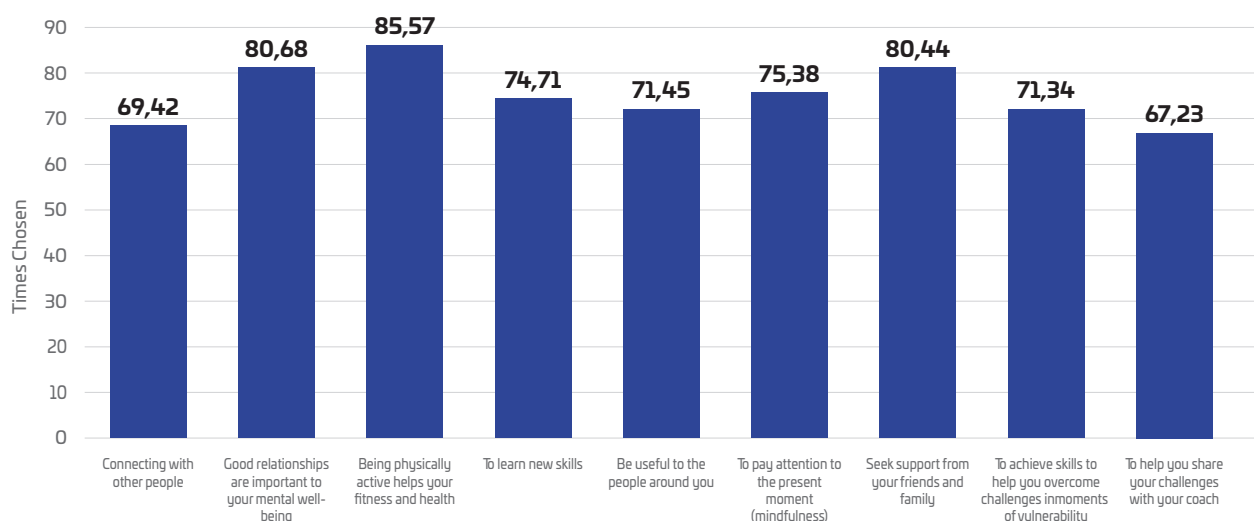


Figure 16

Overall, these means reflect the importance of a holistic approach to mental well-being for young athletes, encompassing physical activity, social connections, skill development, and support systems. It highlights the need for sports organizations and coaches to consider these aspects when addressing the mental health of young athletes. These means reflect the priorities and beliefs of young athletes regarding factors that can contribute to their mental well-being and they underscore the importance of physical activity, relationships, and support systems in maintaining good mental health.

16. Do you have difficulty sharing your feelings with others?

In the "Strong Mind for Success - Mind Matters: Exploring Mental Health in Young" project, respondents were asked whether they have difficulty sharing their feelings with others. The responses to the question about having difficulty sharing feelings with others reveal important insights into the communication challenges faced by young athletes. Here are the key findings based on their responses:

- **Yes (50%):** A significant portion of the respondents, exactly half, indicated that they do have difficulty sharing their feelings with others. This finding highlights the prevalence of communication challenges among young athletes when it comes to discussing their emotions and mental well-being;
- **No (30%):** About 30% of the respondents reported that they do not have difficulty sharing their feelings with others. This suggests that a substantial portion of young athletes is comfortable and open when it comes to discussing their emotions, which is a positive sign for their mental health;

Not sure/Prefer not to answer (20%): Approximately 20% of the respondents expressed uncertainty or chose not to answer the question. This could reflect a level of ambiguity or discomfort with the topic of sharing feelings. (Fig. 17)

Do you have difficulty sharing your feelings with others:

Number of responses: 190

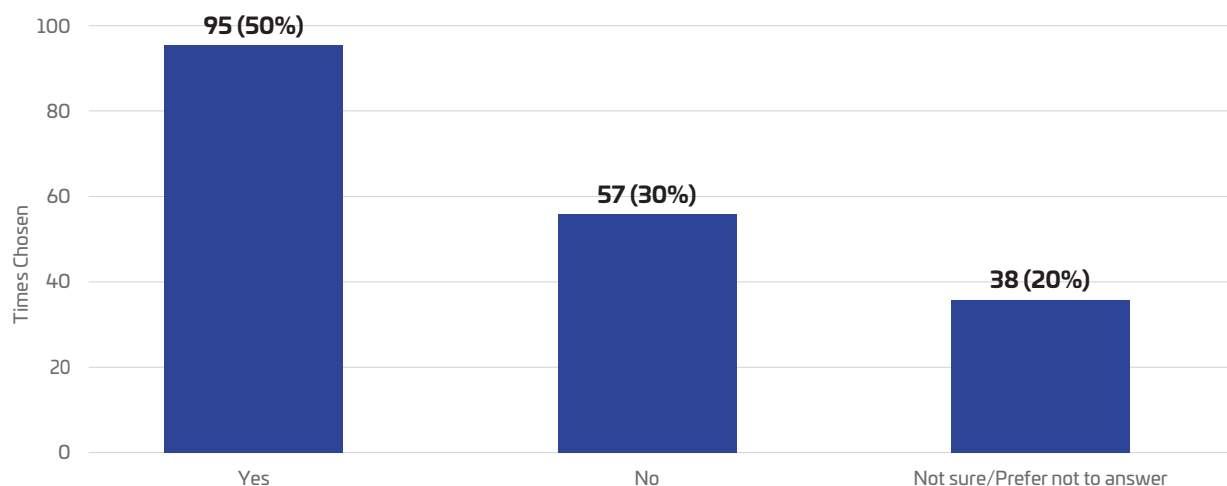


Figure 17

Analysing these responses, it's evident that there is a significant portion of young athletes who experience challenges in expressing their emotions and sharing their feelings with others. This difficulty could potentially hinder their ability to seek support and cope with mental health challenges effectively. On the other hand, a substantial number of respondents feel comfortable sharing their emotions, which may indicate a more open and supportive environment within their sports communities. Recognizing and addressing these communication challenges is crucial for promoting the mental well-being of young athletes and ensuring they have the resources and support they need.

17. Is there a person/person who have supported you in a similar situation/situation?

In response to the question regarding whether respondents have received support from a person or persons in similar situations, the following key findings emerged from the "Strong Mind for Success - Mind Matters: Exploring Mental Health in Young" project:

- **Parents and Family (74.07%):** The majority of respondents, at 74.07%, indicated that they have received support from their parents and family members during situations related to their mental health. This emphasizes the significant role that family plays in providing emotional support to young individuals;
- **Peers (53.44%):** Over half of the respondents (53.44%) reported receiving support from their peers. This suggests that young people often turn to friends and fellow athletes for assistance and understanding during challenging times;
- **Coach/Psychologist at My Club (23.28%):** A notable portion of respondents, at 23.28%, mentioned receiving support from a coach or psychologist within their sports club. This underscores the importance of having mental health professionals within sports organizations to help athletes cope with mental health issues;
- **A Mental Health Expert Outside of My Sports Organization (6.35%):** A smaller percentage of respondents, 6.35%, sought assistance from mental health experts outside of their sports organization. This indicates that some young individuals recognize the value of seeking professional help beyond their immediate sports environment;
- **Other (4.23%):** A minority of respondents (4.23%) mentioned receiving support from sources not explicitly listed in the provided options. These "other" sources could include teachers, friends outside of the sport, or mentors.

These findings emphasize the various sources of support available to young individuals in similar situations. Parents and family members play a crucial role in offering emotional support, followed by peers, coaches, and mental health professionals. The existence of multiple support systems is essential in helping young athletes navigate mental health challenges and promoting their overall well-being. (Fig. 18)

Is there a person/persons who have supported you in a similar situation/situations:

Number of responses: 190

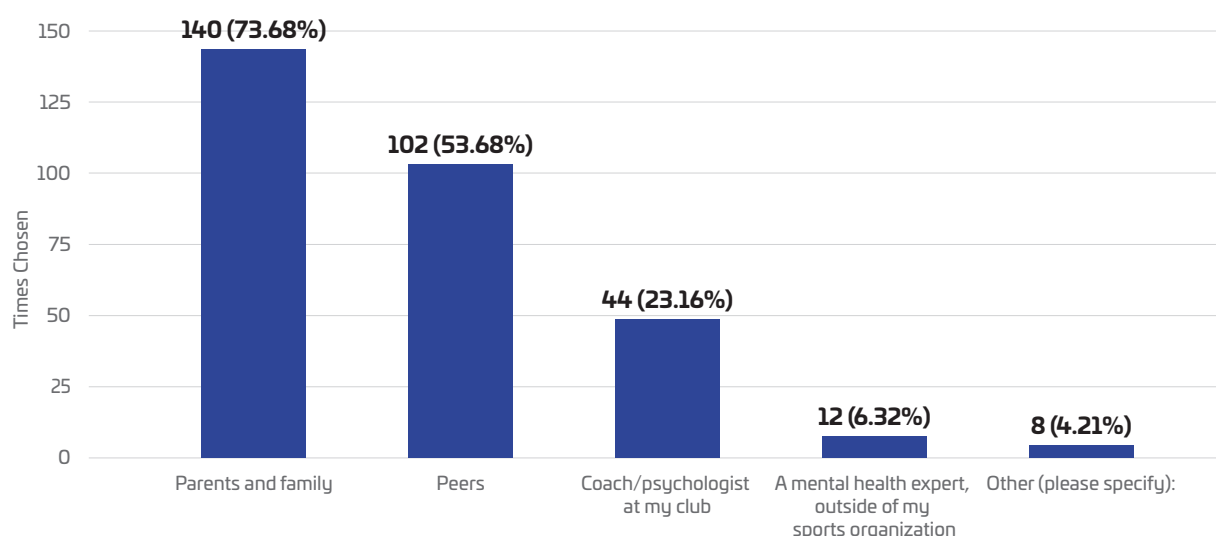


Figure 18



18. Do you think the formulations mentioned in this question can help you and to what extent?

The data from the project "Strong Mind for Success - Mind Matters: Exploring Mental Health in Young" reveals the respondents' perceptions regarding the potential helpfulness of certain formulations in their mental well-being. The means and standard deviations provide insights into the level of agreement and variance among the respondents:

- Focusing on Effort, Not Results (Means 74.77, Standard Deviation 48.35-100): This formulation received moderate agreement among respondents, with a mean score of 74.77. The wide standard deviation suggests that while many respondents find it helpful to focus on effort over results, there is a significant range in how strongly individuals feel about this approach. Some may strongly believe in this philosophy, while others may not find it as beneficial;
- Focusing on Health and Well-being (Means 81.81, Standard Deviation 61.50-100): Respondents generally agreed that focusing on health and well-being is a helpful approach, with a mean score of 81.81. The narrower standard deviation indicates that there is relatively less variance in responses, suggesting a more consistent belief among respondents that prioritizing health and well-being contributes significantly to their mental well-being;
- Recognizing What Success Really Is Will Give a New and More Fulfilling Meaning To (Means 76.74, Standard Deviation 53.02-100): This statement received moderate agreement, with a mean score of 76.74. The standard deviation indicates a moderate level of variance, suggesting that while a sizable portion of respondents finds this concept of redefining success meaningful, others may have differing views or levels of agreement. (Fig. 19)

Do you think the formulations mentioned in this question can help you and to what extent (Means)

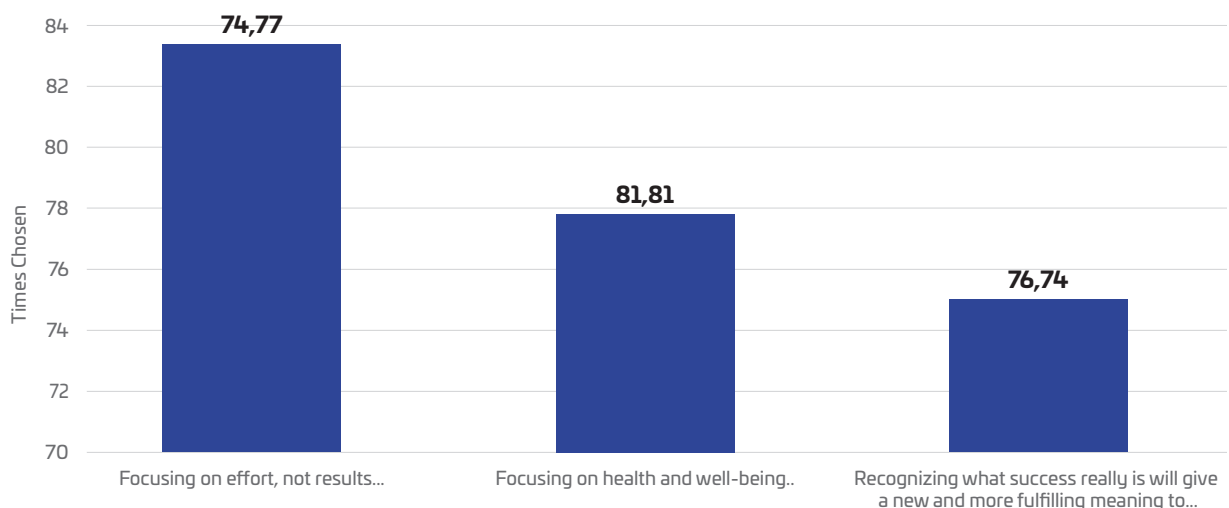


Figure 19

Overall, these findings highlight several important insights:

- Focusing on health and well-being is widely perceived as helpful for mental well-being, with a relatively high mean score and lower variance;
- Focusing on effort, not results, is seen as beneficial by many but with more diverse opinions and a wider range of agreement;
- Recognizing a new definition of success receives moderate agreement, suggesting that this idea may resonate with a significant portion of respondents, although there is still variability in responses.

These results underscore the significance of emphasizing holistic well-being in the context of mental health for young athletes. It's essential for mental health programs and interventions to consider these perspectives and offer a balanced approach that addresses both effort and results, while also promoting health and well-being as integral components of success.

19. Are you interested in the topic of improving mental health in young athletes and would you like to receive more information/practices?

In the "Strong Mind for Success - Mind Matters: Exploring Mental Health in Young" project, respondents were asked about their interest in the topic of improving mental health in young athletes and their willingness to receive more information and practices. (Fig. 20) The data analysis provides valuable insights into the attitudes of the participants:

- **Strong Interest in Mental Health (67.37%):** The majority of respondents, comprising 128 individuals, expressed a keen interest in the topic of improving mental health in young athletes. This high percentage suggests that mental health is a subject of significant concern and relevance within the sports community;
- **Low Disinterest (11.05%):** Only a small fraction of respondents, specifically 21 individuals, indicated that they are not interested in this topic. This implies that the issue of mental health in young athletes is generally acknowledged and valued by the majority of the surveyed individuals;
- **Uncertainty (21.58%):** Approximately 41 respondents fell into the category of being unsure about their interest in the subject. This indicates that there is a segment of the population that may require more information or clarification to form a definite opinion;
- **Positive Implications:** The substantial number of participants interested in mental health improvement underscores the importance of addressing this issue within the realm of young athletes. It also suggests an openness to receiving additional information and practices to enhance mental well-being in the sports context;
- **Potential for Education:** Respondents who are uncertain may benefit from educational initiatives or awareness campaigns that can provide them with insights into the significance of mental health in sports and how it can impact athletic performance;
- **Varied Needs:** Given the diverse responses, it's evident that a tailored approach to mental health education and support in sports may be necessary. Some individuals may require more convincing or personalized guidance to recognize the relevance of mental health in their athletic endeavours;
- **Opportunity for Intervention:** The data suggests an opportunity for mental health professionals and sports organizations to engage with athletes and provide resources and practices that can contribute to better mental well-being;
- **Awareness Building:** For those who are uncertain, efforts to raise awareness about the benefits of mental health support in sports can be crucial in fostering a more informed and engaged sports community.



Are you interested in the topic of improving mental health in young athletes and would you like to receive more information/practices?

Number of responses: 190

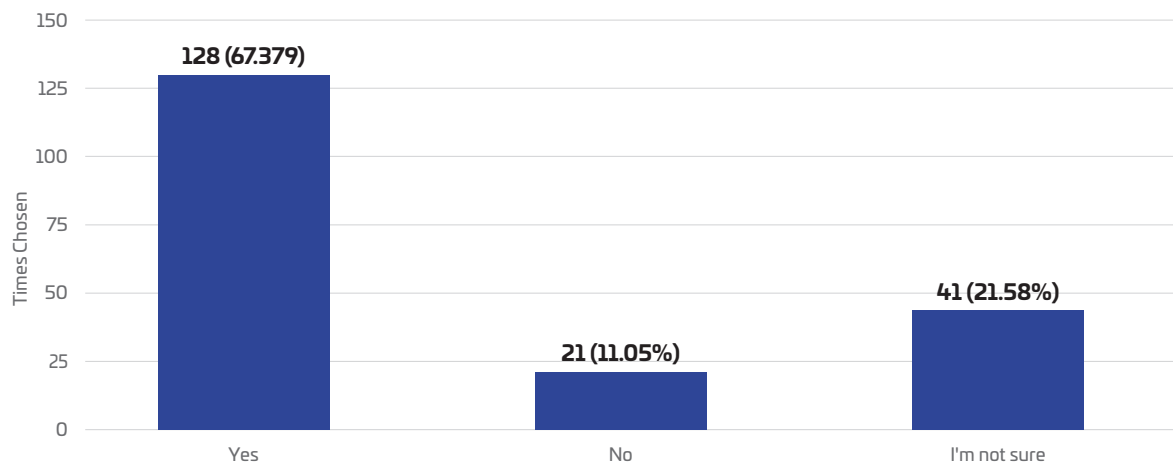


Figure 20

In conclusion, the data indicates a promising level of interest in improving mental health in young athletes, with a small minority expressing disinterest. This highlights the potential for initiatives aimed at enhancing mental well-being in the sports context and underscores the importance of education and awareness-building efforts.

20. If you have practical information and activities for overcoming mental health challenges, do you want to try these practices?

In the "Strong Mind for Success - Mind Matters: Exploring Mental Health in Young" project, respondents were asked about their willingness to try practical information and activities for overcoming mental health challenges. (Fig. 21) The data analysis reveals intriguing insights into their attitudes and openness to such practices:

- **High Willingness to Try (69.47%):** A substantial majority of respondents, comprising 132 individuals, expressed a strong willingness to try practical information and activities aimed at overcoming mental health challenges. This signifies a positive and proactive attitude toward addressing mental well-being in the context of sports;
- **Low Resistance (11.58%):** A relatively small percentage of respondents, specifically 22 individuals, indicated that they are not interested in trying such practices. While this number is comparatively low, it's essential to acknowledge their choice and consider tailored approaches to mental health support;
- **Moderate Uncertainty (18.95%):** Approximately 36 respondents fell into the category of being unsure about whether they would want to try these practices. This indicates a segment of the population that may require more information or guidance to make an informed decision;
- **Positive Implications:** The high willingness among the majority of respondents is a promising sign. It suggests that there is an acknowledgment of the importance of mental health in the athletic context and a readiness to take action to improve it;

- **Diverse Needs:** The data reveals a spectrum of attitudes, from high willingness to resistance and uncertainty. This underscores the need for a flexible and individualized approach to mental health support in sports;
- **Educational Opportunities:** Those who are uncertain may benefit from educational programs or resources that provide them with a better understanding of how mental health practices can enhance their athletic performance and overall well-being;
- **Tailored Support:** Tailoring mental health initiatives to cater to the varying needs and preferences of athletes is essential. It's not a one-size-fits-all scenario, and recognizing this diversity is critical;
- **Supportive Environment:** Creating a supportive and stigma-free environment where athletes feel comfortable exploring mental health practices is crucial. This can encourage those who are uncertain to give it a try;
- **Access to Resources:** Ensuring that athletes have easy access to practical information and activities for mental health improvement is essential. This can help in converting willingness into action;
- **Potential for Positive Change:** The data indicates that there is potential for positive change in how mental health is approached and embraced in the sports community. It's an opportunity for sports organizations, coaches, and mental health professionals to make a meaningful impact.

If you have practical information and activities for overcoming mental health challenges, you might want to try these practices:

Number of responses: 190

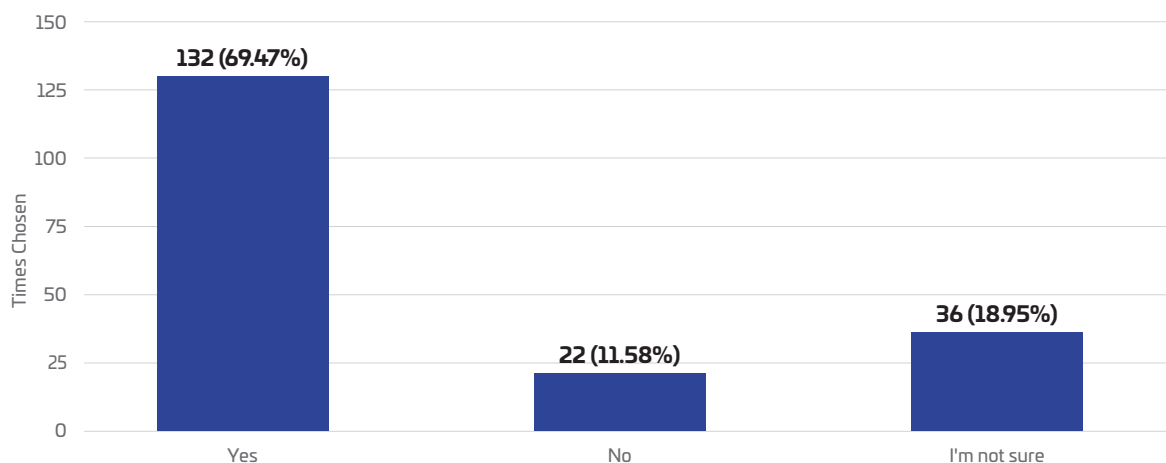


Figure 21

In conclusion, the data suggests a significant willingness among respondents to try practical information and activities for overcoming mental health challenges, although there are variations in attitudes. This willingness presents an opportunity for the development of tailored mental health support programs that cater to the diverse needs of athletes and promote well-being in the sports context.

21. What would be the most convenient format to receive new information about overcoming mental health challenges?

The data collected in the "Strong Mind for Success - Mind Matters: Exploring Mental Health in Young" project regarding the preferred format for receiving new information about overcoming mental health challenges provides valuable insights into the preferences of the respondents:

- **Video Lessons (50%):** The most favoured format among the respondents was video lessons, with nearly half of them, 95 individuals, expressing a preference for this medium. Video lessons offer a dynamic and visual way to convey information and techniques for improving mental health, making it an appealing choice;
- **On-Site Training Course (36.84%):** A significant percentage of respondents, 70 individuals, indicated that they would find on-site training courses convenient. This suggests a desire for in-person, hands-on learning experiences, which can facilitate interaction and skill-building;
- **Podcast (32.11%):** Podcasts were chosen by a notable portion of the respondents, with 61 individuals preferring this format. Podcasts are an accessible way to consume information, and they can be easily integrated into daily routines, such as during commutes or workouts;
- **Online Training Course (25.79%):** Online training courses were favoured by 49 respondents, reflecting the popularity of e-learning platforms. This format provides flexibility and the ability to progress at one's own pace, which is especially convenient for athletes with busy schedules;
- **Brochure (19.47%):** Brochures, although less popular than the aforementioned formats, were still preferred by a significant proportion of respondents, with 37 individuals opting for this traditional printed medium. Brochures can serve as quick references and reminders of mental health practices;
- **Hybrid Course of Study (10.53%):** A smaller yet notable group of respondents, 20 individuals, expressed interest in hybrid courses of study. This format combines both online and in-person components, offering a balanced approach to learning;
- **Handbook (14.21%):** Handbooks, chosen by 27 respondents, provide a comprehensive and tangible resource for mental health information. They can be used as reference guides for ongoing support;
- **Other (2.11%):** A very small percentage of respondents (4 individuals) mentioned "other" formats that were not specified in the options. These could include alternative methods like webinars or interactive apps. (Fig. 22)

What would be the most convenient format to receive new information about overcoming mental health challenges:
Number of responses: 190

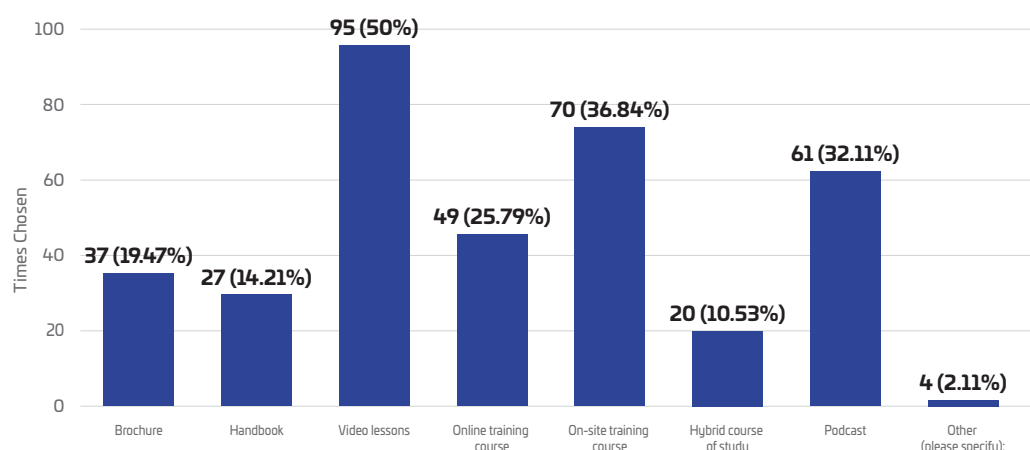


Figure 22

Key Takeaways

- The preference for video lessons highlights the effectiveness of visual and interactive content in conveying mental health information;
- The interest in on-site training courses indicates a desire for in-person engagement and practical learning experiences;
- Podcasts offer a convenient and portable way to access mental health content, aligning with the on-the-go lifestyles of athletes;
- Online training courses provide flexibility and self-paced learning, catering to the varied schedules of athletes;
- Brochures and handbooks, while less popular, remain relevant for athletes who appreciate physical, easily accessible materials;
- Hybrid courses of study offer a blended approach that combines the benefits of both online and in-person learning.

In summary, the diverse preferences for formats underscore the importance of offering a range of resources and educational tools to support athletes in their journey toward improved mental health. Tailoring content to these various formats can enhance accessibility and engagement.

22. Would you like to receive more information about the development of the #SMS initiative?

The data gathered from the "Strong Mind for Success - Mind Matters: Exploring Mental Health in Young" project regarding the interest in receiving more information about the development of the #SMS (Strong Mind for Success) initiative offers valuable insights into the respondents' engagement with the program:

- Yes (61.05%): The majority of respondents, comprising 116 individuals, expressed a strong interest in receiving more information about the development of the #SMS initiative. This substantial response signifies a keen desire for further engagement with and knowledge about the initiative;
- No (22.11%): A notable percentage of respondents, 42 individuals, indicated that they were not interested in receiving more information about the initiative. This may be due to various reasons, including a lack of time, prior knowledge, or a differing focus;
- I'm not sure (16.84%): Approximately 32 respondents fell into the category of being unsure about their interest in receiving more information. This group may benefit from additional clarification or awareness-building efforts to better understand the initiative's potential benefits. (Fig. 23)





Would you like to receive more information about the development of the #SMS initiative:

Number of responses: 190

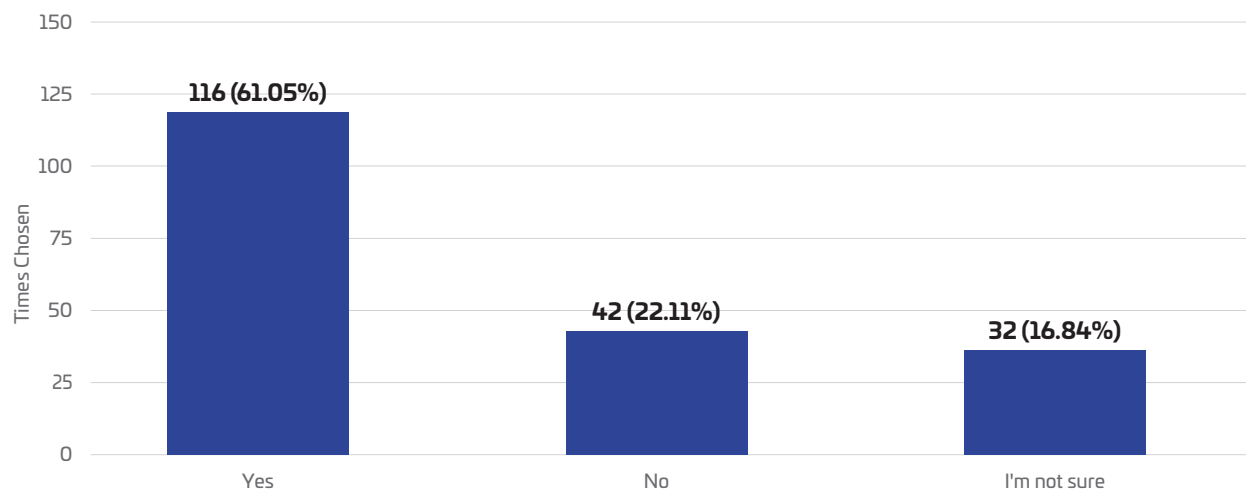


Figure 23

Key Takeaways:

- The majority of respondents are interested in staying informed about the development of the #SMS initiative. This suggests a high level of engagement and enthusiasm for the initiative's goals and objectives;
- The group that expressed disinterest or uncertainty may require tailored communication and outreach efforts to address any reservations or gaps in understanding;
- Providing clear and compelling information about the initiative's impact, goals, and benefits could help garner more support and interest among athletes.

In summary, while a significant portion of respondents is already engaged and eager for more information, efforts should be made to reach those who are uncertain or disinterested to ensure that they have a comprehensive understanding of the #SMS initiative and its potential advantages for their mental health and overall well-being.



#SMS Focus groups summary

Bulgaria

On September 4, 2023, the BSDA took a significant step by conducting interviews with a focus group as part of the SMS – Strong Mind for Success project. This endeavour brought together a diverse group of six participants (3 males and 3 females) to explore and address the critical elements of personal and professional achievement. The focus group featured individuals from a variety of backgrounds, offering unique insights into the challenges and opportunities that shape our communities. Brief information about the answers of the participants can be found below.

The six participants in the focus group had ages ranging from 17 to 18 years old. They had varying years of experience in playing football, with the majority having played for 10 to 13 years. All participants had participated in official football championships, and the highest level of event they had taken part in varied, including national and regional championships, as well as qualifications for the European Football Championship.

All six participants were familiar with the term "mental health." When asked about their understanding of mental health, the majority of the Respondents mentioned "All of the above," only one Respondent referred to it as "psychological well-being." Regarding the main types of mental health, the majority of the Respondents again mentioned "All of the above," two Respondents referred to it as "psychotic disorders (such as schizophrenia)", and "anxiety disorders".

All six participants have experienced feelings related to stress and performance anxiety. Respondent 1 has also experienced panic disorder, Respondent 4 has experienced stress and sadness in addition to performance anxiety, and Respondent 3 specified experiencing performance anxiety monthly. Respondents 4, 5, and 6 indicated experiencing these feelings every week before sports matches, while Respondents 1 and 2 experienced them once in a while.

Here's a narrative summary of the participants' approaches to overcoming mental health challenges related to their football matches:

- Respondent 1 copes by delving deep into introspection and distancing themselves from the upcoming football match through reading books and magazines;
- Respondent 2 focuses on joy-inducing activities such as meeting friends, playing video games, and engaging with family before a match to address mental health challenges;
- Respondent 3 takes a focused approach by not distracting themselves with other activities and letting their thoughts centre on the upcoming match, finding calm in this concentration;
- Respondent 4 uses music, particularly energetic and rhythmic tunes, as a way to prepare mentally before a football match;
- Respondent 5 also turns to music for mental preparation ahead of a football game;
- Respondent 6, on the other hand, prefers to divert their attention away from thinking about the upcoming football game by engaging in various activities.



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In summary, all participants acknowledged a direct connection between their mental health challenges and their football participation or performance. They had varying opinions on different aspects of addressing mental health challenges:

- Connecting with others: Participants generally saw the importance of good relationships, with ratings ranging from 60 to 90;
- Being physically active: Most participants highly valued physical activity for mental well-being, with ratings ranging from 80 to 100;
- Learning new skills: All participants recognized the significance of acquiring new skills for mental health, rating it at or close to 100;
- Giving to others: Ratings for the importance of giving to others varied, ranging from 40 to 60;
- Mindfulness: Participants had mixed views on mindfulness, with ratings between 10 and 50;
- Seeking support from friends and family: The importance of support from friends and family was acknowledged, with ratings ranging from 5 to 90;
- Sharing challenges with their coach: Most participants saw the value in discussing challenges with their coach, with ratings between 55 and 100;
- Reaching out to mental health experts: Opinions on consulting experts for mental health challenges varied, with ratings between 20 and 100.

Here's a summary of the participants' responses regarding their challenges in sharing their feelings and the individuals they turned to for support:

- Respondent 1 did not face challenges in sharing their feelings and received support from parents, their coach, and family members;
- Respondent 2 experienced challenges in sharing their feelings and sought support from parents, their coach, family, and friends of their age;
- Respondent 3 faced challenges in sharing their feelings and received support from parents and their coach;
- Respondent 4 did not encounter challenges in sharing their feelings and received support from parents, their coach, family, and friends of their age;
- Respondent 5 experienced challenges in sharing their feelings and sought support from parents, their coach, family, and friends of their age;
- Respondent 6 did not face challenges in sharing their feelings and received support from parents, their coach, family, and friends of their age.

These responses reflect the participants' experiences in sharing their feelings and the individuals who provided them with support during challenging times.

Overall, the respondents' responses reflect the importance of focusing on effort, health, and well-being in youth sports, as well as the willingness of participants to learn more and try practical exercises to address mental health challenges in sports. Here's a summary of the participants' responses to the questions:

- In response to the statement about focusing on effort rather than results, all participants generally agreed, with ratings between 90 and 100;

- Regarding the statement emphasizing health and well-being in youth sports, most participants agreed, with ratings ranging from 70 to 100;
- Participants had mixed opinions on recognizing different definitions of success in sports, with ratings ranging from 70 to 100;
- However, all participants were willing to try practical information and exercises for overcoming mental health challenges;
- In terms of the preferred format for gaining new information on this topic, participants had various preferences, including hybrid learning courses, podcasts, handbooks, and in-person courses;
- Most participants expressed a willingness to receive more information for the development of the SMS (Strong Mind for Success) initiative, with only one participant indicating they were not interested.

Italy

The focus group was attended by the footballers who went to the international training in Sofia in October. Took part in the project and answered questions Martina, Alice, Federica, Erika, Sonia.

They all recount that they got into sport initially for fun or as a way to get together with friends and then became a real passion by participating in regional championships and being part of a football team. Here is a summary of the participants' answers with respect to their experience with football and how and when they started:

- Respondent 1: I started playing football when i was 6 years old for fun, thanks to my brother and my dad who passed on to me what later became my passion. I play for "Airoidi", a team near my village where I live, and we play in the FIGC (federation) championship;
- Respondent 2: I always played football with my friends as a child, in sixth grade I started playing in a small team and then in eighth grade I started playing in "Origgio" team, I play in a regional league;
- Respondent 3: I've been playing football for two years, this is my third, I started because I wanted to experience a different sport and I was hooked from the start, I play at "Airoidi" team;
- Respondent 4: I started in 2018 and currently play at "Airoidi Origgio" under 17 championships. I started because it has always been my dream and I still like it as much as I did then;
- Respondent 5: I've been playing football for five years, I started playing with my father when I was little and as soon as I found a women's team that convinced me I started, I play in "Origgio" team and I play in the under 17 team.

All five participants were familiar with the term "mental health" although when asked the first question "what do you know about mental health?" most of them replied that they were aware of this topic, but they wanted to explore it further; in fact, when asked in detail during the interview what relationship they had with mental health, each of them recounted specific episodes that touched on multiple topics related to anxiety, sadness and depression.

Here is a summary of the participants' answers to the question "What do you know about mental health?":

- Respondent 1: About mental health I know quite a bit given my past experiences, I think the most important thing is to try to help people who may be weaker than us;



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- Respondent 2: I don't know a lot but it's a subject I'd like to learn more about;
- Respondent 3: Mental health is when our mind is at peace and healthy;
- Respondent 4: Enough;
- Respondent 5: It's a subject I got interested in after a difficult period and I think I know enough.

In their stories, common elements emerge for all the answers: performance anxiety related to school or football matches and the fear of failure in these areas linked to the judgement of friends. Here is a summary of the participants' answers to the questions "What is your relationship with mental health? Have you ever experienced anxiety, sadness, depression? Can you tell us about your experience?":

- Respondent 1: Since I was 14 years old, I started to have episodes of anxiety and sadness more and more frequently until I had my lowest point two years ago during the summer. I felt constantly sad and tired even though the only thing I did was sleep, I found it hard to take care of myself, it became impossible to go out;
- Respondent 2: Even though I don't show my emotions in the eyes of others, I am a very emotional person, not only in terms of sadness but also in terms of happiness. I feel my emotions very much but I keep them to myself, especially if I don't have a great relationship with the person in front of me;
- Respondent 3: I suffer a lot from anxiety, especially before important tasks or matches;
- Respondent 4: I have never had chronic or clinical problems but I have experienced periods of high stress, nervousness, depression and anxiety especially related to school and relationships with friends;
- Respondent 5: now the relationship with my mental health has increased dramatically. I have experienced a lot of sadness in the past years and I always feel anxiety before matches or questions. During games I have anxiety about making mistakes.

When asked the question 'how do you overcome difficult moments? Who do you talk to? Who do you ask for help? What do you do to feel good about yourself and relax?' the girls responded like this:

- Respondent 1: I've always tried to overcome them on my own, I've never liked asking for help, but when I realised I couldn't do it on my own I started to open up to the people closest to me, the person who helped me the most and still helps me is my boyfriend, we've been together for three years and he's always the first to try to make me happy;
- Respondent 2: I don't talk much to people about my problems, I shut myself away and isolate myself from everyone so as not to create more problems;
- Respondent 3: I very often experience difficult moments alone, they are never serious and I overcome them by distracting myself;
- Respondent 4: I talk to my parents, my brother, my friends, sometimes I don't talk and think a lot, music helps me relax a lot and I have many friends that I have learnt to select and with whom I feel very comfortable;
- Respondent 5: I usually talk to various people about less important problems, but I can't talk to anyone about more serious problems (with the exception of my psychologist). To relax I usually listen to music.

As evident, it emerges that they tend not to be able to talk about it with anyone but a few very close people they trust, and many of them use music as a method of relaxation.

As a final question, they were asked what kind of relationship there is between their mental health and football, and

it emerged that for many of them football helps their mental well-being, while for others it is a cause of great stress. In fact, to the question "What is the relationship between your mental health and football?" they answer like this:

- Respondent 1: it often happens to me that my thoughts influence my performance, almost always anxiety and nervousness play a negative role while playing;
- Respondent 2: for me football is a way to let off steam even though many times it ends up being football that causes me anger and sadness and other emotions;
- Respondent 3: my mental health also comes from football, because if I'm not so well and I have practice or games, all the problems disappear and I can be happy;
- Respondent 4: football helps me to let off steam physically, I'm with my girlfriends and we have fun and it clears my mind because when I play, I only think about that and I'm happy;
- Respondent 5: Football makes me feel good. When I play, I stop thinking about problems. I feel very good and being with other people distracts me.

In summary, all participants recognised a direct connection between their mental health problems and their football participation or performance.

Slovenia

On October 20, 2023, the „Endorfin“ sport club, took a significant step by conducting interviews with a focus group as part of the SMS – Strong Mind for Success project. This survey brought together a diverse group of six participants (3 males and 3 females) to explore and address the critical elements of personal and professional achievement. The focus group featured individuals from a variety of backgrounds, offering unique insights into the challenges and opportunities that shape our communities. Brief information about the answers of the participants can be found below. The six participants in the focus group had ages ranging from 14 to 16 years old. They had varying years of experience in playing football, with the majority having played for 7 to 9 years. All of 6 participants had participated in official football championships, and the highest level of event they had taken part in varied, including national and regional championships.

Participants were familiar with the term "mental health." When asked about their understanding of mental health, the majority of the Respondents mentioned "All of the above," only one Respondent referred to it as "psychological" and "social well-being." Regarding the main types of mental health, the majority of the Respondents again mentioned "All of the above," one Respondent referred to it as "mood disorders (such as depression or bipolar disorder)".

All six participants have experienced feelings related to stress. Respondent 1 has also experienced performance anxiety and coping with win/lose, Respondent 3 has coping with win/lose in addition to stress, Respondent 4 specified coping with win/lose and Respondent 6 added sadness. Respondents 1,2,3,5 and 6 experience those feelings once in a while, while Respondent 4 experienced them monthly.

Here's a narrative summary of the participants' approaches to overcoming mental health challenges related to their football matches:

- Respondent 1 copes by talking to parents;
- Respondent 2 focuses on calming methods like listening to the music;



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- Respondent 3 takes a focused approach by trying to think about other things that make him happy (holidays, friends);
- Respondent 4 copes by talking to the trainer;
- Respondent 5 turns to meeting with friends, playing games and listening to the music;
- Respondent 6, prefers to be on his own and thinks about the future matches and how can they be better.

In summary, 4 participants acknowledged a direct connection between their mental health challenges and their football participation or performance. While other 2 participants were not sure.

They had varying opinions on different aspects of addressing mental health challenges:

- Connecting with others: Participants generally saw the importance of good relationships, with ratings ranging from 70 to 90;
- Being physically active: Most participants highly valued physical activity for mental well-being, with ratings ranging from 90 to 100;
- Learning new skills: Participants recognized the significance of acquiring new skills for mental health, rating it from 70 to 90;
- Giving to others: Ratings for the importance of giving to others varied, ranging around 50;
- Mindfulness: Participants' views on mindfulness, were between 50 and 80;
- Seeking support from friends and family: The importance of support from friends and family was high, with ratings ranging from 80 to 100;
- Sharing challenges with their coach: Most participants saw the value in discussing challenges with their coach, with ratings between 70 and 100;
- Reaching out to mental health experts: Opinions on consulting experts for mental health challenges were high, with ratings between 80 and 100.

Here's a summary of the participants' responses regarding their challenges in sharing their feelings and the individuals they turned to for support:

- Respondent 1 did not face challenges in sharing their feelings and received support from parents, their coach, and family members, however respondent 1 said that is not comfortable talking to the peers;
- Respondent 2 did not want to answer;
- Respondent 3 faced challenges in sharing their feelings and received support from parents, friends their age and their coach;
- Respondent 4 did not was not sure about the answer regarding challenges in sharing their feelings and but received support from parents, their coach, and friends of their age;
- Respondent 5 did not experience challenges in sharing their feelings and sought support from family, and friends of their age;
- Respondent 6 faces challenges in sharing their feelings and received support from parents, their coach, and friends of their age.

Overall, the respondents' responses reflect the importance of focusing on effort, health, and well-being in youth sports, as well as the willingness of participants to learn more and try practical exercises to address mental health challenges in sports. Here's a summary of the participants' responses to the questions:

- In response to the statement about focusing on effort rather than results, all participants generally agreed, with ratings between 80 and 100;
- Regarding the statement emphasizing health and well-being in youth sports, most participants agreed, with ratings ranging from 60 to 90;
- Participants' opinions on recognizing different definitions of success in sports had different views, with ratings ranging from 60 to 90;
- However, 4 out of 6 participants were willing to try practical information and exercises for overcoming mental health challenges;
- In terms of the preferred format for gaining new information on this topic, participants had various preferences, including video tutorials, online learning courses, hybrid learning courses, podcasts, and in-person courses;
- Most participants expressed a willingness to receive more information for the development of the SMS (Strong Mind for Success) initiative, with only one participant indicating they were not sure.





CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysed data from the survey "Strong Mind for Success - Mind Matters: Exploring Mental Health in Young" project, several conclusions can be drawn:

- **Awareness and understanding of Mental Health:** A significant majority of the respondents in the "SMS survey" (84.21%) reported being familiar with the term "Mental Health". All participants in the focus group stated that they were familiar with the term "Mental Health". This suggests that there is a baseline awareness of mental health among young athletes in the surveyed group;
- **Perceptions of Mental Health:** The majority of respondents (40.53%) associated mental health with "mental well-being," while a substantial portion (22.63%) associated it with "emotional well-being." An overwhelming majority of respondents (82%) in the focus group stated that the term "Mental Health" for them is related to "All of the above" (emotional well-being, mental well-being, and social welfare). This indicates that there might be some diversity in how young athletes conceptualize mental health, but many recognize its connection to emotional and mental well-being;
- **Types of Mental Health Issues:** Respondents demonstrated awareness of various mental health issues, with mood disorders (31.58%) and anxiety (19.47%) being the most recognized. This suggests that these issues are on the radar of young athletes, highlighting the importance of addressing these concerns;
- **Experiences of Mental Health Challenges:** A significant number of respondents in the survey reported experiencing mental health challenges such as stress (63.16%), sadness (70.53%), and performance anxiety (64.21%). These findings underscore the prevalence of such challenges among young athletes;
- **Frequency of Mental Health Challenges:** Most respondents in the survey (64.74%) indicated experiencing mental health challenges occasionally, emphasizing that these issues are not isolated incidents but rather recurrent concerns;
- **Overcoming Mental Health Challenges:** Encouragingly, a vast majority of respondents in the survey (89.07%) reported that they had managed to overcome their mental health challenges. This suggests resilience and coping abilities among young athletes;
- **Support Systems:** Parents and family members emerged as the primary sources of support (73.68%) for young athletes facing mental health challenges, followed by peers (53.68%). This underscores the crucial role of familial and peer support in addressing mental health issues;
- **Interest in Mental Health Programs:** The data from the survey reveals a strong interest (67.37%) among young athletes in improving mental health and receiving more information and practices to support their mental well-being;
- **Preferred Learning Formats:** Video lessons (50%) and on-site training courses (36.84%) were the most preferred formats for receiving information about overcoming mental health challenges. This suggests that multimedia and practical, in-person approaches are well-received;
- **Challenges in Sharing Feelings:** Approximately half of the respondents in the survey (50%) reported having difficulty sharing their feelings with others. This highlights the importance of creating safe spaces for young athletes to express their emotions and seek support;
- **Potential Interventions:** Respondents in the survey provided various strategies for overcoming mental health challenges, including seeking professional help, talking to friends and coaches, engaging in physical activities, and practicing mindfulness. These strategies can inform mental health interventions tailored to young athletes.

The collected data indicates that young athletes are aware of mental health issues, face these challenges to varying degrees, and are interested in programs and support to enhance their mental well-being. The findings emphasize the importance of promoting mental health awareness, providing accessible support systems, and delivering mental health programs in engaging formats for this demographic.





RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysed data from the survey "Strong Mind for Success - Mind Matters: Exploring Mental Health in Young" project, several recommendations can be made:

- **Mental Health Education:** Implement comprehensive mental health education programs within sports organizations to increase awareness and understanding of mental health among young athletes. These programs should cover various aspects of mental health, including emotional well-being, coping strategies, and seeking help when needed;
- **Destigmatize Mental Health:** Foster a culture that destigmatizes mental health challenges in sports. Create an environment where athletes feel comfortable discussing their mental health concerns without fear of judgment or reprisal;
- **Peer Support Networks:** Encourage the formation of peer support networks within sports teams. Young athletes often find it easier to confide in teammates who may be experiencing similar challenges. These networks can provide a sense of community and understanding;
- **Family Involvement:** Recognize the crucial role of parents and family members in supporting young athletes' mental health. Provide resources and workshops for parents to help them understand and address their children's mental health needs;
- **Professional Support:** Offer access to mental health professionals, such as psychologists or counsellors, within sports organizations. These professionals can provide guidance, counselling, and interventions when athletes face mental health challenges;
- **Crisis Intervention:** Develop a clear protocol for handling mental health crises among young athletes. Ensure that coaches, staff, and peers are trained to recognize signs of distress and know how to respond effectively;
- **Diverse Learning Formats:** Provide mental health education and resources in various formats, catering to different learning preferences. This can include video lessons, workshops, brochures, and online courses;
- **Cultivate Resilience:** Incorporate resilience-building exercises and practices into sports training programs. Teach young athletes' strategies for managing stress, setbacks, and performance anxiety;
- **Mental Health Screening:** Implement regular mental health screening assessments to identify athletes who may be at risk or in need of support. This can help in early intervention and support planning;
- **Promote Self-Care:** Educate young athletes about the importance of self-care and self-awareness. Encourage practices like mindfulness, meditation, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance;
- **Safe Spaces:** Create safe and confidential spaces for athletes to share their feelings and seek support. This could include designated mental health support rooms or channels for anonymous communication;
- **Continuous Monitoring:** Maintain ongoing monitoring of the mental health and well-being of young athletes throughout their sports journey. Regularly check in with athletes to assess their mental health status;
- **Collaboration with Mental Health Experts:** Collaborate with mental health experts and organizations experienced in youth mental health to develop tailored programs and interventions;
- **Multidisciplinary Approach:** Foster a multidisciplinary approach to mental health care by involving coaches, psychologists, parents, and peers in the support network;
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Establish mechanisms for athletes to provide feedback on the effectiveness of mental health programs and interventions. Use this feedback to continuously improve support systems;

- **Promote Positive Coaching:** Train coaches to adopt positive coaching techniques that prioritize athletes' mental and emotional well-being alongside physical performance;
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Launch awareness campaigns to reduce the stigma associated with seeking mental health support. Encourage athletes to view mental health care as an essential aspect of their overall well-being;
- **Longitudinal Studies:** Conduct longitudinal studies to track the mental health journey of young athletes over time and identify trends and patterns in mental health challenges and resilience;
- **Accessible Resources:** Ensure that mental health resources and support are accessible to athletes, regardless of their socio-economic background or geographic location;
- **Collaboration:** Collaborate with sports organizations, schools, and mental health institutions to share best practices and collectively work towards improving the mental health of young athletes.

These recommendations aim to create a holistic approach to supporting the mental health of young athletes, fostering resilience, and promoting overall well-being within the sports community.





Tips and Tricks how to address mental health challenges

Addressing mental health challenges among young football players is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, the intense and competitive nature of professional sports, including football, can subject young athletes to immense pressure and stress, which may lead to mental health issues if not properly managed. Additionally, the stigma surrounding mental health in sports often discourages athletes from seeking help or discussing their struggles openly.

By providing practical exercises and tools specifically tailored to young football players, we empower them to recognize, cope with, and overcome mental health challenges. This proactive approach not only enhances their overall well-being but also improves their performance on the field. Furthermore, promoting mental health awareness and resilience within the football community fosters a supportive and inclusive environment, breaking down stigma and encouraging young athletes to prioritize their mental well-being.

Addressing mental health challenges in young football players is essential for their personal growth, athletic development, and long-term success both in sports and in life. In the following part are revealed practical exercises designed to empower young athletes, particularly those in the world of football, with valuable tools to address and navigate mental health challenges. By offering tips and tricks tailored to their unique needs and experiences, we aim to equip these budding sports stars with the skills and strategies necessary to foster mental well-being, resilience, and peak performance on and off the field. These exercises not only promote self-awareness and emotional regulation but also encourage open dialogue, ultimately fostering a supportive and inclusive sports environment where mental health is a priority.



Practical Exercises for Young Athletes

1. **Relaxation techniques:** Teach young athletes' techniques such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and visualization to help them manage stress and anxiety.
2. **Mindfulness:** Encourage young athletes to practice mindfulness to help them stay present in the moment, and to avoid getting caught up in negative thoughts and emotions.
3. **Positive self-talk:** Teach young athletes how to use positive self-talk to build their confidence and self-esteem.
4. **Goal setting:** Help young athletes set realistic and attainable goals for themselves, both in sports and in life.
5. **Time management:** Teach young athletes how to manage their time effectively to balance sports, school, and other responsibilities.
6. **Journaling:** Encourage young athletes to write down their thoughts and feelings about their sports experiences, this can help them to identify patterns and triggers of mental illness, and learn how to manage them. You can use as well #SMS Mental health journal, available at www.sportsuccess.org
7. **Support system:** Provide young athletes with a support system of family, coaches, and friends who can help them cope with the mental and emotional demands of being an athlete.
8. **Seek Professional help:** Encourage young athletes to seek out counselling or therapy if they are struggling with mental illness, and make sure they have access to appropriate mental health services.
9. **Resilience:** Building resilience in young athletes, teaching them how to cope with setbacks, how to overcome adversity, and how to bounce back from disappointment.
10. **Education:** Educate young athletes about mental health, the warning signs of mental illness, and how to seek help if they need it.





Key takeaways

5 key takeaways from the #SMS research on mental health among young athletes:

- **Awareness and Understanding:** A significant majority of respondents in the survey (84.21%) are familiar with the term "mental health," showcasing a foundational level of awareness among young athletes.
- **Perceptions and Diversity:** There's a diverse range of perceptions regarding mental health, with associations made predominantly to "mental well-being" (40.53%) and "emotional well-being" (22.63%). This diversity emphasizes the varied conceptualizations of mental health among young athletes.
- **Recognized Mental Health Issues:** Young athletes demonstrated recognition of various mental health issues, notably mood disorders (31.58%) and anxiety (19.47%), underscoring the importance of addressing these prevalent concerns.
- **Prevalence and Recurrence:** The research highlighted the prevalence and recurrent nature of mental health challenges among young athletes, with a majority reporting experiences of stress, sadness, and performance anxiety.
- **Resilience and Support:** Encouragingly, a vast majority (89.07%) managed to overcome their mental health challenges, indicating resilience among young athletes. Family (73.68%) and peers (53.68%) emerged as primary support systems.

These findings stress the importance of acknowledging mental health challenges, diversifying support systems, and tailoring mental health programs in engaging formats to support the mental well-being of young athletes.

Encouraging Parents and Coaches to be Supportive:

In the intricate world of youth sports, parents and coaches play pivotal roles that extend far beyond the side-lines and training sessions. Their influence can shape not only a child's athletic journey but also their overall development as individuals. Emphasizing the significance of their supportive roles is not just a mere encouragement but a fundamental necessity for nurturing confident, resilient, and emotionally intelligent young athletes.

Building a Supportive Parent-Coach Partnership

The relationship between parents and coaches forms the foundation of a child's sports experience. It is essential to cultivate open lines of communication, fostering an atmosphere where concerns, expectations, and achievements are shared openly. Parents are the primary source of emotional support for young athletes. Acknowledging their child's efforts, regardless of the outcome, boosts self-esteem and reinforces a positive attitude toward sports. Coaches, on the other hand, act as mentors, guiding young athletes through challenges and victories. Encouraging coaches to recognize and appreciate the unique strengths of each child cultivates a sense of belonging within the team.

Nurturing Emotional Resilience and Sportsmanship

Beyond the physical aspects of sports, emotional resilience and sportsmanship are invaluable lessons that parents and coaches can impart. Teaching children to cope with both success and failure instills resilience, preparing them for life's challenges. Parents can help by reframing failures as opportunities for growth, emphasizing the importance of effort and determination. Coaches, through their guidance, instill the values of teamwork, respect, and fair play, shaping young athletes into not just skilled players but also respectful individuals.

Supportive parents and coaches create a safe environment where young athletes can express their fears, doubts, and aspirations without judgment. This emotional safety net enhances their confidence, allowing them to explore their potential freely. Encouraging parents and coaches to be empathetic listeners, understanding the pressures and expectations faced by young athletes, fosters trust and strengthens the bond between them.

In essence, encouraging parents and coaches to be supportive goes beyond the realm of sports; it is about nurturing character, resilience, and self-belief. By recognizing the impact of their words and actions, parents and coaches become architects of not only athletic success but also lifelong confidence and emotional intelligence in the young athletes they guide. Their unwavering support paves the way for a generation of individuals who approach challenges with grace, determination, and a deep understanding of their own worth.

Lifelong Benefits of Overcoming Mental Health Challenges

Empowering Young Minds and Hearts

The journey of overcoming mental health challenges is not just a battle fought in silence; it is a transformative odyssey that shapes the very core of a young person's character. Young football players, in particular, face the dual pressure of athletic performance and societal expectations. Emphasizing the lifelong benefits of overcoming mental health challenges is not merely a gesture of support; it is a beacon of hope guiding these young souls toward resilience, self-discovery, and unparalleled strength.



The Path to Inner Resilience

In the realm of sports, mental fortitude is as crucial as physical prowess. Encouraging young football players to confront their mental health challenges head-on nurtures a resilience that extends far beyond the pitch. It teaches them the art of self-reflection, enabling them to understand their emotions, anxieties, and fears. By embracing these challenges, they embark on a transformative journey toward self-acceptance and emotional intelligence, paving the way for a future where obstacles are seen as opportunities for growth.

Breaking the Stigma

Acknowledging mental health challenges openly dismantles the stigma surrounding mental well-being. Young football players are not only athletes but also advocates for change. By sharing their stories and triumphs, they inspire others to seek help, fostering a culture of understanding and empathy. Emphasizing that mental health challenges do not define a person but refine them empowers these young individuals to perceive struggles as stepping stones, not stumbling blocks.

The Lifelong Legacy of Mental Wellness:

Enhanced Emotional Intelligence

Overcoming mental health challenges equips young football players with a profound understanding of human emotions. They develop empathy, compassion, and an acute awareness of their own mental well-being. These emotional skills transcend the field, enriching their personal relationships and making them into compassionate leaders both on and off the pitch.

Resilience Beyond Sports

The resilience forged in the battle against mental health challenges becomes an enduring armour in the face of life's adversities. Young football players emerge not just as formidable athletes but as resilient individuals prepared to navigate life's complexities. They learn to bounce back from setbacks, approach challenges with determination, and inspire others with their unwavering spirit.

Fostering Long-term Mental Wellness

The journey of overcoming mental health challenges does not end; it evolves into a commitment to mental wellness. Emphasizing the importance of ongoing self-care and seeking support when needed instils a lifelong habit of prioritizing mental health. These young individuals, armed with the wisdom of their experiences, become advocates for mental wellness, shaping communities where seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Emphasizing the lifelong benefits of overcoming mental health challenges for young people, especially young football players, is a testament to their resilience and determination. It is a declaration that their journey is not defined by obstacles but by the courage to confront and conquer them. By recognizing and celebrating their triumphs, we empower them to forge ahead, transforming challenges into stepping stones toward a future of boundless possibilities.

#SMS – Strong Mind for Success Tools

#SMS Podcast Mind in the Game

Are you ready to transform your game and embrace mental well-being as a crucial aspect of your football journey? Tune in to “Mind in the Game: Nurturing Mental Well-being in Football” and immerse yourself in a world of knowledge, inspiration, and empowerment. Together, we will foster a strong, resilient mindset that will elevate your football experience to new heights. So, grab your headphones, press play, and let the game of mental fortitude begin!



#SMS Mental health journal

The #SMS Mental Health Journal, a cherished companion on the path to emotional well-being, serves as a private sanctuary for young minds to express their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. This personal record becomes a powerful instrument, enabling them to navigate the intricate landscape of their mental health. With the ability to monitor progress, pinpoint triggers, and cultivate healthy coping strategies, this journal becomes an invaluable tool for self-discovery and healing. By meticulously penning down their innermost thoughts and emotions, young individuals gain profound insights, fostering a deeper understanding of their mental well-being. Through the #SMS – Strong Mind for Success Journal, readily available for download, young hearts are encouraged to embark on this transformative journey of self-reflection and growth, with the flexibility to print it in either black and white or a vibrant, colourful version, enhancing the therapeutic experience.





#SMS Augmented Reality

Discover the transformative power of mental resilience with our cutting-edge “Strong Mind for Success” Augmented Reality (AR) Application, designed exclusively for young football players. Immerse yourself in calming animations and interactive experiences that enhance your mental well-being. This innovative digital platform utilizes Augmented Reality to create a captivating journey, empowering your mind and instilling essential life skills. To embark on this transformative experience, simply install the application on your device using the provided QR code, follow the in-app instructions to identify a flat surface, and let the empowering journey toward a strong mind and success begin.



Disclaimer and authors

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