

Research shows that one out of three adults experiences a mental health disorder during their lifetime. Furthermore, one out of five adults reports experiencing a mental health disorder in the last year. Even though elite athletes are often portrayed as superhumans who can withstand all kinds of pressure and stress, they too are prone to developing mental health symptoms. As shown by the recent summary of research in this area - the prevalence of mental health symptoms in elite athletes might be similar to or even higher than in the general population. Researchers from this area express the need for more studies that could help in better understanding the trajectory of mental health symptoms of elite athletes over several years and the underlying psychological risk/protective factors.

Against this backdrop, in collaboration with the National Centre for Sports Medicine in Poland, we have adapted and validated the International Olympic Committee Sport Mental Health Assessment Tool 1 - a novel psychometric tool that allows screening for mental health concerns in athletes. It comprises an initial triage and several psychometric instruments to assess the presence and severity of anxiety symptoms, depressive symptoms, sleep disturbances, alcohol misuse, drug misuse, and eating disorders. In the current project, we will use the International Olympic Committee Sport Mental Health Assessment Tool 1 in two study paths to better understand the trajectory of mental health symptoms in the 4 years between the Paris 2024 and the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games and to gain insights into the psychological risk factors that negatively affect athletes' mental health.

In the first research path, we will introduce mental health screening during the mandatory health check-up that over 1700 elite athletes from the Olympic sports undergo twice a year in the National Centre for Sports Medicine. Seven waves of research in this path are planned to be conducted in person, in the National Centre of Sports Medicine by trained psychologists hired in this project. In the second research path, a more intensive measurement would take place, with the mental health screening being administered every month together with several measures in a group of 260-300 participants recruited at random from those participating in the first research path. Five waves of measurement are planned in this research path.

Planned in this manner, the research project would 1) provide insights into the trajectory of elite athletes' mental health in the period between the Paris 2024 and the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games, 2) allow for a better understanding of the interplay between the psychological risk/protective factors, and 3) contribute to elevating the mental health literacy in those involved in high-level sport and promote health-seeking behaviours.