

# Prevalence and characteristics of sports injuries in athletes with flat feet: A quantitative descriptive study

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**Submission date:** 08-Jul-2023 10:01AM (UTC+0700)

**Submission ID:** 2127960958

**File name:** 7\_FIX.pdf (417.25K)

**Word count:** 5654

**Character count:** 30969

# Prevalence and characteristics of sports injuries in athletes with flat feet: A quantitative descriptive study

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Received: 06 April 2023; Accepted 18 June 2023; Published 08 August 2023  
Ed 2023; 8(2): 207-216

## ABSTRACT

The study of sports injuries is a crucial and captivating topic that requires thorough exploration. Understanding and effectively managing sports injuries is essential for coaches, instructors, and athletes. However, there is limited awareness among sports practitioners, particularly regarding flat foot conditions. Therefore, this research aims to identify common injuries among athletes with flat feet through a comprehensive survey. Employing a quantitative descriptive method with a survey-based approach. This study included a sample of 89 male athletes who sought treatment for sports-related injuries at massage clinics. Data collection techniques encompassed observations, interviews, questionnaires, and measurement tests. Purposive sampling was utilised for participant selection. Wet footprint tests, stature metres, weight scales, and questionnaires were employed for data collection. Data analysis employed the percentage formula and was supported by Excel software. The findings indicated that athletes with flat feet were more susceptible to knee injuries (69%), ankle injuries (31%), external causes of injury (22%), internal causes of injury (52%), and overuse injuries (26%). These results imply that athletes with flat feet who seek treatment at massage clinics commonly experience knee and ankle injuries, with internal trauma being the leading cause. This study contributes to a better understanding of injury identification among individuals with flat feet, aiding in the selection of appropriate sports activities. Limitations of this study include a single research site, an uneven distribution of sports disciplines, and a male-only sample. Future research should employ more comprehensive methods and ensure representative samples across various sports to facilitate proper generalisation of the data.

**Keywords:** Identification; sports injuries; athletes; flat feet



[https://doi.org/10.25299/sportarea.2023.vol8\(2\).12602](https://doi.org/10.25299/sportarea.2023.vol8(2).12602)

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**How to Cite:** Setiawan, A., Priyanto., & Yudhistira, D. (2023). Prevalence and characteristics of sports injuries in athletes with flat feet: A quantitative descriptive study. *Journal Sport Area*, 8(2), 207-216. [https://doi.org/10.25299/sportarea.2023.vol8\(2\).12602](https://doi.org/10.25299/sportarea.2023.vol8(2).12602)

**Authors' Contribution:** a – Study Design; b – Data Collection; c – Statistical Analysis; d – Manuscript Preparation; e – Funds Collection

## INTRODUCTION

The study of sports injuries holds significant importance and is an intriguing topic for discussion (Weiler et al., 2016). It is crucial for coaches, instructors, and athletes to have a comprehensive understanding of this subject in order to effectively manage training programmes and minimise the occurrence of injuries in sports (Dhillon et al., 2017; Weiler et al., 2016). Research has shown that incorporating injury prevention strategies into the design of exercise programmes is paramount to comprehending the injury history and implementing

appropriate measures to mitigate such incidents (Sanusi, 2020). Furthermore, a thorough understanding of sports injuries helps foster a safe and conducive training environment, thereby optimising athletes' performance and well-being

Injuries are defined as the outcome of external forces exerted on the body or specific body parts, surpassing the body's capacity to withstand and respond to such forces (Magrone, 2022; Sun et al., 2023). Excessive force or energy imposed on the body leads to injuries, overwhelming its ability to cope and adapt (Hasanah, 2019). Numerous studies have corroborated that sports injuries primarily affect the musculoskeletal system and can also impact other physiological systems due to the demands of training, competitive matches, and post-match activities (Alexander et al., 2020; Graha, 2019). Understanding the nature and mechanisms of sports injuries is essential for developing effective injury prevention strategies and optimizing athletes' overall health and performance.

The cause of injury is two factors, namely internal and external factors. Internal factors such as muscle weakness, imbalance of agonist and antagonist muscle strength, extreme alignment of joint weakness and instability, inflexible muscles, tissue weakness, biomechanical weakness, overweight, lack of conditioning exercises, and psychological changes during the game (Haddara et al., 2020; Handayani, 2019; Poppler & Moran, 2020; Wang et al., 2015). External factors include errors in training, high levels of exercise, training schedules and matches that are too close so that recovery is not optimal, injuries due to cheating, hot weather that causes awareness, damaged infrastructure, and environmental problems (Bhardwaj, 2013; Ciesla et al., 2014; Southwick & Crupi, 2017).

Based on the detailed examination of various internal and external factors, this study specifically focuses on the skeletal or musculoskeletal system, which plays a crucial role in the structure of the foot arch. The foot arch can be categorised into three types: low arches, high arches, and normal arches (Jauza et al., 2023). A normal foot structure is characterised by the foot being perpendicular to the ground on the posterior surface of the calcaneus, with the arch height falling within the normal range (Sunardi et al., 2020). High arches, also known as pes cavus, occur when the calcaneus bone is inverted, resulting in a pronounced arch (Sunardi et al., 2020). Conversely, a flat foot, also known as pes planus, is characterised by the lateral rotation of the calcaneus bone and a low or absent foot arch (Sunardi et al., 2020).

In addition, when an analysis is carried out that the foot arch is useful for reducing shock and balancing the body (Subhan & Graha, 2019). In line with other studies that when the feet come into contact with the ground, the bend of the foot supports body weight and functions as a shock absorber (Subhan & Graha, 2019). Therefore, the arch of the foot becomes a balance between the front foot and the back foot (Rosdiana et al., 2022). So that doing analysis of the structure of the foot becomes important for prevention for individuals or sportsmen.

Furthermore, the presence of the arch impacts a person's mobility to be faster and more agile when moving from one location to another, because the arch serves to reduce the athletes' shock when performing activities that rely on physical characteristics as the primary aspect (Imam et al., 2021). According to the studies, the arches of the soles of the feet serve as stability, mobility, and damping when athletes and individuals perform regular movement activities and exercise (Subhan & Graha, 2019). A survey done at a sports injury massage clinic (MCO) found that there were 260 cases in July, 264 cases in August, 413 cases in September, 325 cases in October, 308 cases in November, and 365 cases in December 2020. Based on these data, we can conclude that the number of people injured each month is increasing, particularly in September and December.

Based on the data analysis, the authors investigated the factors that lead to injuries experienced by athletes, including internal factors such as questioning the source of the injury, the length of the injury, and the sport involved. Internal factors such as specific foot arch form features such as flat feet, on the other hand, are still lacking in analysis. According to the authors' observations at the Sports Injury Massage (MCO) clinic, there are still sports practitioners who do not grasp the technique for determining the kind of arch of the foot, particularly the flat foot type. In addition, sports practitioners must understand that foot arch factors can affect performance and are a cause of injury in sports (Pan et al., 2023).

Many studies have examined the prevalence and characteristics of flat feet, such as Ramirez’s study, which examined the level of understanding to identify the morphology of the medial longitudinal arch, with the results that 18.5% of individuals were able to identify, the rest could not identify and misdiagnose (Ramírez & Suárez-Reyes, 2022). Recently, [11] found a study on the identification and prevalence of flat feet in college students with the results that age, body mass index, type of shoes, and nationality influence the occurrence of flat feet (Vashisth et al., 2023). Another relevant study states that the identification of flat feet is necessary to develop an appropriate program for athletes (Javidi Mostaghni et al., 2022).

These studies focused in part on one sport and university students only. Although many studies have [19] conducted research related to the prevalence and characteristics of flat feet. While complex identification in terms of age, body mass index, sports, and martial arts, injury history and duration, as well as internal and external factors, have received less attention in previous studies. In this context, this research played a role in filling the gap in previous research. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine the prevalence and characteristics of sports injuries in flat-footed athletes with quantitative studies.

## METHOD

The authors utilised a quantitative descriptive research method with a survey approach to generate conclusions from this research (Akhiruyanto et al., 2022; Hafidz et al., 2021). Purposive sampling was utilised in this study, which found a sample of 89 participants who met the criterion for flat feet, aged 15-44 years, male and female. The sampling was conducted from April to May 2021. Interviews and questionnaires were used to obtain data. The instruments in this study were wet footprint tests, stature meter [2] eight scales, and questionnaire sheets (Antara et al., 2017). The data analysis technique used percentage analysis with the formula  $P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$ , P=percentage sought, F=frequency, N=number of respondents, data analysis was assisted using the Excel application (Akhiruyanto et al., 2022; Simanjuntak et al., 2022; Yudhistira et al., 2023).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study, which took place in April-May 2021, aimed to identify sports injuries in athletes who visited [14] sports injury massage clinic (MCO). Identification based on the following parameters is reported in this study: (1) age, (2) body mass index, (3) sports involved, (4) identification of ankle and knee injuries, (5) classification of injuries based on causative factors, and (6) duration of the injury. The research subjects in this study were athletes who had ankle and knee injuries. When ankle and knee injuries are looked at more closely, there is a classification of the tissue that has an impact on the injury to the ankle and knee joints. Aside from that, to do further study, the authors analysed the injury in terms of the primary causes and the length of the injury. The followings are the results and discussion data.

Table 1. Identification of Age Categories, BMI and Sports Branches

Age	Frequency	Percentage
15-19 years old	6	7%
20-24 years old	24	27%
25-29 years old	24	27%
30-34 years old	16	18%
35-39 years old	11	12%
40-44 years old	8	9%
Category	Frequency	Percentage
Thin	3	3%
Normal	51	46%
Pre-obesity	34	31%
class I obesity	19	16%
Class II obesity	3	3%
Class III obesity	0	0%
Sports Branches	Frequency	Percentage
Football	30	33%
Futsal	18	20%



Sports Branches	Frequency	Percentage
Volleyball	14	16%
Badminton	8	10%
Basketball	5	6%
Running sport	6	7%
Bicycle sport	3	3%
Martial Sports Branch	2	2%
Bowling	1	1%
Free diving	1	1%
Court tennis	1	1%

According to the findings presented above, the most injured sample was 20-24 years old (27%), 25-29 years old (27%), and 35-39 years old (18%). These data confirm that the dominating age group that is injured was 20-29 years old. Based on the data, the obese II sample was 3.37%, the obese I sample was 16.00%, and the pre-obese sample was 31.00%. These findings point to a particular concern, that the higher the fat in the body is one determinant in the likelihood of injury. The results above showed that football had the highest percentage of injuries (33%), futsal had 20%, volleyball 16%, and badminton 10%. It should also be noted that sports that rely on physical contact are inherently dangerous.

**Table 2. Results of Analysis of Ankle, Knee Injury, Causal Factors and Duration of Injury**

	Tissue	Percentage	Frequency
Ankles	Ligament	15	54%
	Muscle	13	48%
	Tendons	0	0%
	Bone	0	0%
Knee	Ligament	48	79%
	Muscle	13	21%
	Tendons	0	0%
	Bone	0	0%
Causative factor	External Violence	20	22%
	Internal Violence	46	52%
	Over-use	23	26%
	Month(s)	Frequency	Percentage
Duration	1-5	47	53%
	6-10	16	18%
	11-15	8	10%
	16-20	2	2%
	21-25	7	7%
	26-30	0	0%
	31-35	0	0%
	36-40	5	6%
	41-45	0	0%
	46-50	2	2%
	51-55	0	0%
	56-60	2	2%

Based on the findings, ankle injuries have a 54% impact on ligaments and a 48% impact on muscle tissue, whereas knee injuries have a 79% impact on ligaments and a 21% impact on muscle tissue. Furthermore, the internal violence factor is 52%, over-use is 26%, external violence is 22%, and the duration of the injury is 53% for 1-5 months and 18% for 6-10 months. This is of crucial concern because flat feet are one of the leading contributors to injury, particularly to the ankles and knees.

From a medical standpoint, it is known that the epiphyseal plate closes between the ages of 17 and 20. As a result, the closure of the epiphyseal plate indicates that the athletes' posture has stabilised (Wardhani, 2020). In terms of long-term athlete development, athletes join the training to complete the phase between the ages of 17 and 21. This means that athletes prioritise match performance (Varghese et al., 2022). At this

stage, athletes are focused on improving their ability in the sport they are participating in, as well as improving their roles and positions in their respective sports (Varghese et al., 2022).

This is why athletes between the ages of 17 and 21 are at risk for injury. Logically, athletes at this stage want to provide their best effort and win every game (Gustian, 2016). Furthermore, when athletes are neglectful and physical decline is undoubtedly a factor in injury, a level of concentration, attention, and vigilance is essential in every match (Gustian, 2016). Therefore, athletes aged 17-21 years who are in the training to complete stage require a comprehensive physical training programme to assist and minimise injury (Rasyono & Setiawan, 2021).

Aside from the age factor, one of the concerns that cause injury is the body mass index factor. Obese athletes predominated in the authors' study. Athletes with less-than-ideal bodies are more likely to sustain injuries because they support and maintain body posture so that the feet become the primary support so that they may perform sports activities appropriately. According to prior research, being overweight is unhealthy. It is generally associated with fitness such as strength and endurance, followed by low neuromuscular levels such as body coordination and balance (Carter & Mich<sup>23</sup>, 2011).

Intriguing evidence was also discovered indicating the association between body mass index to injury is strong, with ankle injuries, particularly sprains, being the most common (Amoako et al., 2017). This is owing to the individual<sup>20</sup> inability to alter momentum fast and effectively, resulting in injury (Tyler et al., 2006). The stress used on the ankle ligaments during the support phase to move specific<sup>15</sup> elements feels heavy because of a high increase in body mass index, leading to injury (Fousekis et al., 20<sup>17</sup>). Supported by other studies that individuals who are obese for a long time can affect the arrangement of the arches of the feet which will cause flat feet (Pourghasem et al., 2016).

According to the survey's findings, football is the most injury-prone sport. Basketball, volleyball, and futsal come next. Many studies have shown that body contact sports are highly risky for injuries (Yudhistira et al., 2021a; Yudhistira et al., 2021b; Yudhistira & Tomoliyus, 2020). According to a more extensive study on the sport of football, the factors that cause injuries in football include extrinsic factors. This factor is associated with facilities and infrastructure, training management, and the number of matches played, whereas intrinsic factors are associated with biological and psychosocial conditions such as individual flexibility (muscle and ligament pathological weakness), a history of previous injuries, an inadequate rehabilitation process, and functional instability (Renshaw & Goodwin, 2016; Theisen et al., 2014).

It is explained that extrinsic factor that causes injuries is a violation in a match (Samia et al., 2021). Furthermore, a lack of training preparation, such as warm-ups and an insufficient number of exercises, as well as several matches that are not following the training phase, raises the risk of injury (Whyte et al., 2018). It was established that sports involving physical contact require special attention from both internal and external factors so that athletes can prepare as early as possible to avoid injuries.

According to the study results, factors that contribute to the occurrence of injuries include internal violence, external violence, and overuse. The results of this poll show that internal violence is the leading cause of injury. Furthermore, studies suggest that ankle and knee injuries mostly damage the ligaments and muscles. We can deduce from this that internal violent causes or factors connected to body anatomy play a significant role in producing injuries when athletes practise and compete.

This internal factor is similar to the athletes' physical anatomy, which includes the shape of flat feet. Injuries in sports can be induced by abnormal anatomical configurations such as hyperlaxity, according to previous studies (Wardhani, 2020). Hyperlaxity is a joint condition in which the degree of surface translation widens as the elasticity and length of the joint connective tissue increase (Wardhani, 2020). When normal joint capacity fails to maintain mechanical stability, hyperlax<sup>21</sup> occurs, resulting in bodily instability (Wardhani, 2020). If this problem is not addressed, it will result in flat feet, which is the condition of the soles of the feet curving lengthwise or collapsing (Wardhani, 2020). Flat foot's condition of the soles of the feet allows for more injuries than normal soles (Widiantoro, 2013).

Athletes with flat feet will endure fatigue and disrupted body balance because the lever system cannot work properly when the foot departs its foothold (Utami & Syafr<sup>i</sup>, 2021). Moves involving bodily balance pose a significant risk of injury to the muscles and ligaments (Steinberg et al., 2016). Flat feet are

anatomical conditions in which the medial arches or longitudinal soles collapse (Koeswandi et al., 2022). This is because when doing weight-bearing activities, the entire surface of the soles of the feet touches the floor (Koeswandi et al., 2022).

Humans have a flat foot form at birth due to an adipose cushion under the medial longitudinal arch; this condition will improve between the ages of two and five years (Koeswandi et al., 2022). There are also flat feet that develop in adulthood as a result of obesity, genetics, and hypokinesia (Sadeghi-Demneh et al., 2016). According to other sources, flat feet are caused by muscle imbalance, bone structural distortion, ligament weakness, and posterior tibial tendon dysfunction (Kido et al., 2013; Letafatkar, 2013; Tashiro et al., 2015). Furthermore, the duration of the injuries suffered by research subjects ranged from 1 to 10 months. This is one of them influenced by the improper handling and care of injuries before entering the sports injury massage clinic (MCO). It could also occur as a result of past injury cases that have not fully recovered. Thus, the authors can divide the injuries into two categories: acute and chronic. According to relevant studies, the duration of activity is related to the duration of the injury. This is directly proportional to flat feet, which is related to hyperlaxity since flat feet can come from overly flexible ligaments and, in the long run, from hyperlaxity (Atik, 2014).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions presented, it can be concluded that knee and ankle injuries are the most prevalent among athletes with flat feet who seek treatment at sports injury massage clinics. The data collected indicates that the majority of these injuries are attributed to internal factors. Consequently, this study holds valuable insights that can benefit practitioners, athletes, and trainers in understanding foot arches and injury classification. Considering that anatomical structure contributes to injury occurrence, sports practitioners are encouraged to select sports that align with their specific anatomical structure. Additionally, athletes with flat feet are advised to engage in exercises that enhance balance and strength. Furthermore, the utilization of appropriate equipment and technology can aid performance and reduce the risk of injury for athletes with flat feet. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, including the limited sample size, the absence of gender categorization, data collection from a single research location, and the restriction of data analysis solely to percentage descriptions. Further research is needed to address these limitations and enhance the findings of this study.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank the Semarang State University institution for granting permission for this research, allowing it to be done appropriately. The authors would want to thank their colleagues and research subjects for their contributions to the success of this research.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

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