

COVID-19 pandemic: Is there any impact on the mental health of athletes?

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COVID-19 pandemic: Is there any impact on the mental health of athletes?

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 Pandemic has led to the emergence of restrictive policies that have an impact not only on the physical aspect but also on the psychological impact of athletes. This study aims to examine the mental health conditions of Central Java athletes. The research method used is descriptive qualitative which is conducted on 20 athletes in Central Java. The sampling technique in this research is purposive sampling technique. This research is conducted in five stages, namely the preparation of definitions, observation-interview guidelines, data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation. Methods of data collection using observation and interview technique. The collected data is then analyzed through data verification, coding, tabulation, and presentation. The results of this study indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on aspects of activity related to sport activities, aspects of mental condition, and aspects of financial well being of athletes. In the aspect of mental state, the athletes showed some negative emotion such as boredom, disappointment, and confusion. The emergence of these negative emotions resulted in decreased concentration and decreased motivation of the athletes in training. Mental problem that do not get psychological treatment are feared to be the cause of the emergence of disorders more severe mental health in athletes. The results of this study can be used as recommendations for coaches and the government in developing programs to improve athlete achievement through physical and mental strengthening. Suggestions for further research are the need to develop an instrument for measuring athletes' mental health and analyzing mental health factors in athletes during a pandemic.

Keywords: Psychological; mental health; covid-19; athlete



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

INTRODUCTION

The existence of the COVID-19 pandemic condition poses many challenges for performance in the world of sports, one of which is for the lives and careers of athletes (Samuel et al., 2020). One of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic is regarding the existence of policies related to restrictions (Brooks et al., 2020). The restrictive situation experienced around the world has caused many athletes to adapt their sports training without the appropriate tools or space to properly develop their training routines (Leguizamo et al., 2021). In addition, restrictions imposed by health authorities have resulted in a number of national and international sports competitions being postponed or canceled in an effort to limit the spread of the virus (Leguizamo et al.,

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2021). The restriction policy aims to prevent the spread of COVID-19, but this policy also has a negative impact, especially on the social and psychological aspects of individuals. The existence of this restriction policy resulted in many social activities that must be limited such as worship activities, work activities and even activities in carrying out sports training for athletes. The restriction policy asks people to carry out activities at home and limit activities outside the home. This condition results in many people feeling bored to be in the house so they are vulnerable to experiencing psychological problems.

For athletes, the restriction policy reduces activity in sports, symptomatic athletes are also asked to isolate themselves, cannot play an active role in the sports community, decreases interaction with coaches, lacks social support, causes emotional stress and even psychological disorders (Reardon et al., 2020). In addition, athletes also complained of feelings of sadness and frustration due to changes in training routines and postponement of sporting events (Grubic et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, for a competitive athlete felt they had lost their community which was a source of social support and changed their routine activities, which is one component of managing depression or anxiety (Toresdahl & Asif, 2020). The results of research on athletes in Bengkulu province show that the psychological abilities of athletes are related to how they perceive the COVID-19 pandemic (Sugihartono et al., 2021). The existence of good psychological abilities can prevent the emergence of mental health disorders in athletes.

The COVID-19 pandemic not only has an impact on changes in the psychological condition of athletes but also changes related to training activities. The results of preliminary research on a number of Central Java athletes and coaches in March 2021, found that in this pandemic situation, athletes were still asked to carry out their routine activities such as training but carried out at home. Some of these athletes said that the tutorial on training techniques and monitoring of exercises by coaches for a number of sports was carried out by a WhatsApp video call service. This is similar to the results of research that training from home (TFH) during a pandemic situation, exercise is carried out through the zoom application and google meet (Divina et al., 2020). This of course has an impact on changing the way athletes train. As stated by athletes during preliminary research, this change in the way of training causes them to have to prepare supporting facilities and infrastructure. Delivered by Divina et al. (2020) training from home requires several things that athletes must prepare, such as the need for a strong internet network, the availability of capable gadgets, an online meeting application and a supportive home environment. The condition of TFH in athletes causes some athletes to complain of decreased motivation so they often skip training, and feel bored and confused because they are not used to doing exercises online (Divina et al., 2020).

For most athletes, this sudden disruption in their training schedule will lead them to set new goals during the situation. Brooks et al. (2020) found that for athletes who are at the end of the competitive stage, a changing situation, such as a pandemic, can mean an abrupt end to their career, which can increase unpleasant emotions during restrictions. Research shows that these situations can have adverse psychological effects such as symptoms of post-traumatic stress, confusion, and anger (Brooks et al., 2020; Davis et al., 2020). According to Killgore et al. (2020) in dealing with this situation, some athletes may still be able to develop their potential, but some other athletes may experience a negative response for weeks to months. Killgore et al. (2020) also found that individuals may respond differently to emotional distress caused by traumatic events such as this pandemic. The emergence of negative emotions in athletes or their inability to manage stress can lead to more serious mental health problems such as short-term or long-term depression (Frank et al., 2020).

Based on this research, it can be concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic situation has an impact on athletes (Grubic et al., 2021; Reardon et al., 2020; Toresdahl & Asif, 2020). In addition, based on the results of preliminary research conducted on Central Java athletes it showed that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in changes both of physically and psychologically. Researchers found that there was no specific study that described the mental health condition of Indonesian athletes in the COVID-19 pandemic situation. The restriction policy asks people to carry out activities at home and limit activities outside the home. This condition results in many people feeling bored to be in the house so they are vulnerable to experiencing psychological problems. This study aims to build a rich and in-depth perspective on the mental health of athletes during the COVID-19 pandemic so as to be able to expand the literature related to strategies for

solving mental health problems in athletes. The result can be used as a basis for preparing preventive and curative programs for mental problems that arise in athletes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHOD

The research method used in this research is descriptive qualitative method. This research method aims to describe a research phenomenon through samples or data collected and a conclusion that applies generally is made (Sugiyono, 2017). Variable in this research is mental health. Mental health is a situation where individuals do not experience psychological disorders and are able to function optimally, able to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, able to actualize themselves, and able to establish social relationships with the surrounding environment. Data collection techniques used in this research method are observation and interviews. In research, observation is needed to understand the process of the interview so that the results of the interview can be understood properly and in context. Observations made are observations of the subject, by observing the behavior of the subject during the interview. Subject interaction with researchers is considered important and can be additional data from interviews. The observation technique used in this study is participant observation, where the researchers make observations by participating in the subject's activities. Aspects that are observed during the research process are how the emotional responses, how the behavior responses and how the subject's thinking ability is during the research implementation process. For the recording method, the researchers use descriptive systematic observation where the researchers have compiled a guide to make observations and recorded in the form of a narrative.

The interview technique in qualitative research is in-depth interviews. In-depth interview is the process of obtaining information for research purposes by means of question and answer while conducting face-to-face meetings between interviewers and informants with or without using interview guidelines. The interview should be focused on the content that is in accordance with the expected objectives. The type of interview used in this study is a semi-structured interview. Where before starting the interview, the researchers will prepare interview guidelines first. The questions in the interview guideline are based on the concept of mental health.

The population in this study is 441 athletes from 39 sports (group and non group sports). Subjects of this study amount to 20 people. Sampling techniques use purposive sampling, the researchers set several criteria for the research sample. The research criteria include: first, join the association of athletes in the province of Central Java (KONI Jateng) and stay in Semarang, second Athletes who are in preparation for the National level competition, third is less than 35 years old, and the fourth is being willing to participate in the research process from start to finish. Data collection is carried out in March 2021.

The stages of this research consist of five stages and the research flow is depicted in. First stage, here begins with the preparation of a definition of the field that is the topic of study, namely mental health. The formulation of the definition of the study topic is carried out by conducting a literature review on mental health. Second stage, researchers begin to develop observation guidelines and interview guidelines. At this stage, the results of the mental health literature review are the basis for researchers to develop interview guidelines and observation guidelines. Third stage, researchers began to collect data on mental health in athletes which was carried out by interview and observation techniques. Forth stage, the researchers analyze the data obtained manually. The results of the interview will be converted into verbatim form and a meaning unit analysis process will be carried out. While the results of observations, will be analyzed the behaviors that will support the results of the interview. Fifth stage, the researchers interpret the data obtained in stage 4 so that the concept of "Athlete's mental health during a pandemic" emerges.

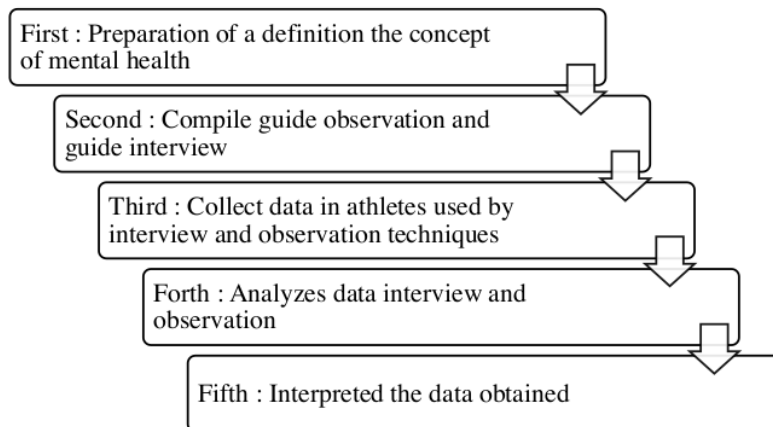


Figure 1. The Stages of This Research

24 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

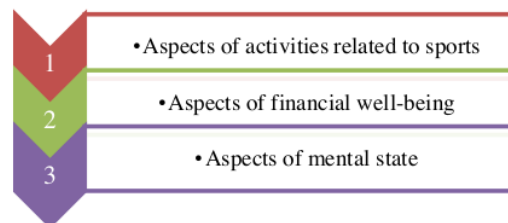
The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Athletes

Based on the results of the analysis carried out from interview and observational data regarding the impact of COVID-19 on athletes mentality, it can be seen in Table 1. The answers are grouped into the same theme or category. Based on the results of coding response answers regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, several components are found to be affected as shown in Table 1. Table 1 shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on sports activities, psychological conditions, and financial income for athletes.

Table 1. The Impact Felt by Athletes

No.	Impact	Frequency	Percent
1.	Changes in carrying out sports-related activities	20	100%
2.	Changes in psychological condition	18	80%
3.	There is no additional income from the competition	20	100%

Based on Table 1, the COVID-19 pandemic has an impact related to changes in carrying out sports-related activities by 100%, changes in psychological conditions by 80%, and there is no additional income from the competition by 100%. The results of this study indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on three major aspects of athletes' lives. There are three main aspects that are affected and are described in Figure 2. The first aspect is activities related to sports, the second aspect is related to mental conditions, and the third aspect is financial well-being.



20 Figure 2. Aspects Affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic

The results of this study state that the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on their sports activities. This is discussed in the first aspect, namely activities related to sports which are aspects of activities that are carried

out routinely to support the activities of the sports that are occupied. During the COVID-19 pandemic, changes are found in the sports activities of athletes. Changes related to sports activities in athletes are described in Table 2.

Table 2. Sports-Related Changes Experienced by Athletes

No.	Changes experienced	Frequency	Percent
1.	Exercises are done independently at home	20	100%
2.	Exercises are guided by coaches through social media	20	100%
3.	The frequency of exercise decreases due to independent training	15	75%
4.	No competition	20	100%
5.	Restrictions on members to do exercises in one time and one place (team sport)	7	35%

Based on Table 2, changes in athletes related to the experience of sports activities are changes related to exercise are done independently at home by 100%, changes related to exercise are guided by coaches through social media by 100%, the frequency of exercise decreases due to independent training by 75 %, the absence of competition is 100%, and there are restrictions on members to do exercise in one time and one place by 35%. Based on the coding results from the answers submitted by athletes about the various changes experienced due to the pandemic, it can be formulated that the changes related to sports experienced by athletes include several things as shown in

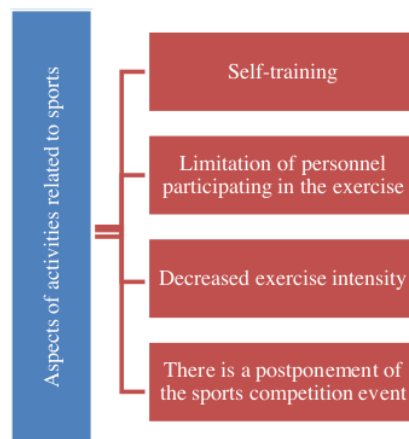


Figure 3. Aspects of Activities Related to Sports

The second aspect that is affected by this situation is related to the athlete's financial well-being. Various responses given by athletes related to changes in welfare related to financial conditions are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Athletes' Responses to Changes in Financial Well-Being

No.	Respon	Frequency	Percent
1.	Decreased incentives due to no competition	20	100%

Based on Table 3, the responses given by athletes is related to the athlete's financial well being is about decreased incentives due to no competition by 100%. Based on the results of the analysis, it is found that indicators of changes related to the financial well-being of athletes are shown in Figure 4.

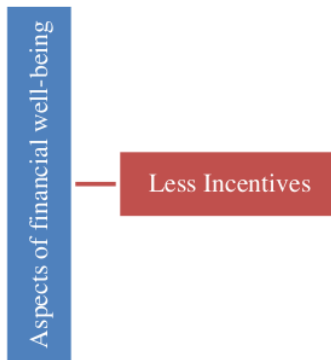


Figure 4. Aspects of Financial Well-Being

Financial well-being is a condition in which individuals have the capacity to cope with emerging financial problems. The Covid-19 pandemic condition resulted in the postponement of sporting competition events which ultimately has an effect on decreasing the incentives received by athletes. The third aspect is the changes related to the mental condition of athletes. Mental condition is an individual's psychological condition where he can function properly and does not experience any psychological complaints. Changes to aspects of mental condition in athletes are described in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Changes in the Mental State Felt by Athletes

No.	Changes experienced	Frequency	Percent
1.	Tired of doing exercises at home	20	100%
2.	Tired of training routines without the presence of friends and coaches in person	10	50%
3.	Tired of not having a race	8	40%
4.	Disappointed that there is a delay for the competition	20	100%
5.	Disappointed that the situation does not improve	5	25%
6.	Confused by the confusing news regarding the competition	12	60%
7.	Confused by news related to covid-19	10	50%
8.	Decreased concentration due to confusion and boredom	5	25%
9.	Decreased motivation due to independent exercise routines	8	40%
10.	Decreased motivation because there is no competition	15	75%
11.	Decreased motivation because there are no training partners as a measurement of self-competence	13	65%

Base on **Table 4**, there are changes in the mental state felt by athletes, there is the condition of being tired of doing exercise at home by 100%, being tired of training routines without the presence of friends and coaches in person by 50%, being tired of not having a race by 40%, feel disappointed that there is a delay for the competition by 100%, feel disappointed that the situation does not improve by 25%, being confused by the confusing news regarding the competition by 60%, being confused by news related to covid-19 by 50%, decreased concentration due to confusion and boredom by 25%, decreased motivation due to independent exercise routines by 40%, decreased motivation because there is no competition by 75%, and decreased motivation because there are no training partners as a measurement of self-competence by 65%. The results of coding from the answers submitted by athletes regarding the mental condition felt by athletes during a pandemic, it can be formulated that these changes include several things as shown in **Figure 5**.

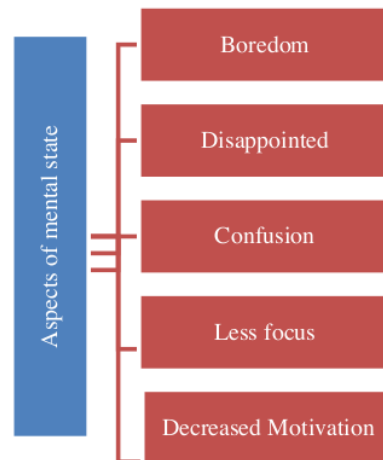


Figure 5. Aspects of Mental State

Mental Health of Athletes During the Covid-19 Pandemic

The results of this study indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on athletes. There are three aspects that are affected, namely aspects of activities related to sports, aspects of financial well being and aspects of mental state. Aspect of activities related to sport have three changes in activities such as self-training, restrictions of personnel participation, decreased exercise intensity, and there is a postponement of the sport competition event. There is a change related to the style of practice which is initially carried out in groups or decentralized to become an exercise that is done independently. Self training resulted in the athletes feeling the absence of measurement from the coach and the interaction between the coach and the athlete is reduced. This is in line with research which states that independent training can reduce the quality of interaction between coaches and athletes (Reardon et al., 2020). Many athletes do not get supervision from the coach so that athletes find it difficult to direct their goals when self training (Impellizzeri et al., 2020). This condition contradicts the findings of this study which states that even though athletes do self training, they still get supervision from coaches through social media, but there are some athletes who feel pressured to get supervision from a coach. This is because coaches make a lot of demands, such as asking athletes to send videos during training. These demands make athletes feel uncomfortable in training.

The second change is the limitation of personnel who are actively involved in training activities, this condition is mostly felt by athletes who come from team sports such as football. Personnel restrictions in the field result in difficulties in coordination and cooperation among team members. Coordination and cooperation have an important role in athletes, namely being able to increase achievement, self confidence, and motivation (Apriansyah et al., 2017). The existence of good coordination and cooperation also affects communication between athletes. Poor communication between athletes will have an impact on the athlete's ability and readiness to face the competition (Aznan et al., 2018). The fourth change is a decrease in exercise intensity, where before the COVID-19 pandemic the intensity of exercise can be done six times a week but after the Covid-19 pandemic it decreases to three times a week. This of exercise will have an impact on the physical condition of the athletes. Exercise also has an important role for athletes, which can affect power and skills which will have an impact on athletes' performance when competing (Hidayat et al., 2020; Rasyono, 2019). The fifth change is the postponement of sports competition events both national and international. The existence of sports competition events for athletes can be one of the benchmarks for their abilities. The inability to participate in competitive events makes decrease in the athlete's activity related to the sport of interest (Reardon et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic situation also has a positive impact, such as athletes having longer time to train due to event delays. This is supported by the results of research which states that during a pandemic, athletes have a longer time to improve their quality, redesign goals, and improve techniques that are still poorly

mastered (Latella & Haff, 2020). The COVID-19 condition causes changes in the mental condition of athletes such as the emergence of feelings of boredom, disappointment, confusion, decreased ability to concentrate and a decrease in motivation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, athletes complained about the emergence of boredom and confusion because they are not used to doing online exercises, this condition also results in a decrease in motivation so that they are often absent from training (Divina et al., 2020). The second is aspects of financial well being. During the COVID-19 pandemic, athletes experience a decline in welfare related to financial aspects. This condition is due to athletes do not take part in competitions during the pandemic so they do not get prizes. The first aspect and the second aspect are aspects that arise due to external factors from the athlete. These external factors include the environment and existing policies during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. The third is aspects of mental state are related to boredom, disappointed, confusion, less focus, and decreased motivation. Aspects of mental state related to mental health conditions.

Mental health is a mental condition of an individual who is able to function optimally, able to be active, productive, able to establish social relationships, and able to adapt to an uncertain environment (Schinke & Stambulova, 2017). Mental health conditions are not only marked by the absence of mental disorders in a person, but how the individual is able to recognize the potential in himself so as to improve his mental well-being (Schinke & Stambulova, 2017). At present, mentally healthy individuals can be defined in two ways, namely from the absence of mental disorders in individuals and on the other hand the presence of characteristics of mentally healthy individuals. The characteristics of mentally healthy individuals refer to positive conditions or traits, such as good psychological well-being, strong character and good qualities in oneself (Lowenthal, 2006). The inability to solve a problem can lead to excessive stress, which makes the individual's mental health more vulnerable and eventually is declared to have a mental health disorder (Putri et al., 2015). The issue of mental health is still underestimated by the people of Indonesia. There is still a high stigma towards people with mental health disorders, resulting in many sufferers not getting optimal treatment (Putri et al., 2015). This has resulted in many people hiding conditions related to their mental health.

Mental health is an important aspect for athletes because they are often exposed to uncertain situations (Henriksen et al., 2020). Athletes have several risk factors related to mental health. Some of these risks include the incidence of injury, performance that does not meet expectations, overtraining, stress, depression, mental strength, and the type of sport where individual sports are more risky than team sports, adverse events, lack of social support and sleep problems (Purcell et al., 2019; Suter et al., 2018). Currently, the COVID-19 pandemic, which causes restrictions and even lockdowns, has an impact on the mental health of athletes. The lockdown due to COVID-19 has had a negative effect on the mental health of young Spanish athletes, negative effects such as anxiety, depression, loss of self-confidence, sleep disturbances, and social dysfunction (Monl et al., 2020; Pons et al., 2020). This is in line with the findings of this study where athletes raise problems related to their mental health conditions. This condition is characterized by the emergence of negative emotions. The negative emotions that arise are boredom, disappointment, and confusion in athletes. This is in line with previous research which states that the COVID-19 pandemic condition results in an increase in negative emotions such as anger and confusion in athletes (Brooks et al., 2020; Özen et al., 2021).

Boredom is an unpleasant experience that results in decreased attention both in terms of thoughts and feelings and interactions with the environment that cause dissatisfaction (Eastwood et al., 2014). During the COVID-19 pandemic, athletes complained of feeling bored. This boredom is caused by the boredom associated with independent exercise routines. Independent training activities result in decreased social support received by athletes. Athletes can get social support not only from family but also from coaches and friends before the COVID-19 pandemic. The conceptual framework of mental health for athletes can be explained using an ecological system in which mental health is the relationship between individual aspects or experiences such as coping strategies and the wider socio-cultural context. This condition is also influenced by the microsystem of athletes, namely coaches, training friends, and family. While the wider sports environment such as sports rooms, sports regulations, and organizations form an ecosystem (Purcell et al., 2019). The emergence of boredom in athletes is also caused by the absence of sports competition events that make athletes feel dissatisfied. Prolonged boredom will cause more serious mental health problems, namely anxiety and stress (Bosselman et al., 2021; Chao et al., 2020). Boredom is not only experienced by athletes

but also sports students, where the COVID-19 pandemic situation has resulted in them not being able to practice directly and only getting information from online (Mylsidayu, 2021). This condition resulted in a decrease in his motivation to carry out sports activities.

Another negative emotion that appears in athletes during the COVID-19 pandemic is disappointment. The emergence of this feeling of disappointment is caused by unexpected conditions which resulted in the athletes not being able to apply the results of their current training and potential due to the postponement of the race event. This is in line with research which states that disappointment appears as a form of individual response to unexpected and uncontrollable negative events (Zeelenberg et al., 2000). The COVID-19 pandemic is an unexpectedly negative situation and has resulted in a lot of changing sporting activities for athletes. In this competition, athletes are not able to take measurements of their potential, so fear and anxiety arise in themselves to achieve the targets that have been set before the pandemic (Ruffault et al., 2020). Disappointment has a relationship with the emergence of feelings of anger and sadness in someone (Zeelenberg et al., 2000). This condition will certainly have an impact on the mental health and motivation of the athletes in actualizing their potential.

There is also confusion among athletes due to uncertainty related to the pandemic conditions and the conditions for the implementation of sporting competition events. The existence of confusing information related to the implementation of competition events and information related to COVID-19 further increased confusion among athletes. This is in line with research which states that the COVID-19 pandemic causes psychological responses, one of which is confusion (Brooks et al., 2020). Confusion that arises in individuals and is not handled properly can cause the individual to experience emotional stress, but it also affects how the individual perceives what he sees and experiences.

The emergence of negative emotions in athletes during the COVID-19 pandemic is a reflection of mental health conditions. The continued presence of negative emotions can lead to serious mental health related disorders. The negative emotions that arise are due to changes in training styles and changes to the postponement of the race schedule (Brooks et al., 2020; Davis et al., 2020; Gorczynski & Aron, 2020). This pandemic condition does not directly lead to the emergence of problems related to mental health, this depends on how the athlete's attitude towards a change will affect their emotional distress (Parm et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic situation has an impact on aspects of activity related to sports activities, aspects of mental condition, and aspects of financial well being of athletes. In the aspect of mental state, the athletes show some negative emotions such as the emergence of boredom, disappointment, and confusion. The emergence of these negative emotions result in decreased concentration and decreased motivation of the athletes in training. Mental problems that do not get psychological treatment are feared to be the cause of the emergence of disorders more severe mental health in athletes. The results of research related to mental conditions in athletes can be used as a reference for developing an intervention program to improve mental health in athletes. The form of intervention programs to improve the mental health of athletes can be aimed at reducing boredom, disappointment and confusion. The decrease in psychological problems is expected to increase achievement and increase subjective well being in athletes. Limitation of this study is that a questionnaire has not been used to measure the concept of mental health of athletes. Quantitative results from measurement using questionnaires can complement the descriptive result of this study. Beside that, there is no detailed identification related to specific variables in mental health specifically. Suggestions for further research are the need to develop an instrument for measuring athletes' mental health and analyzing mental health factors in athletes during the pandemic.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no competing interest in this study.

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