



## The Psychological Impact of Covid 19 Restrictions on Athletes

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### Abstract

Restrictions on community activities implemented by the government to resolve the spread of the Covid 19 virus have closed several sports facilities, deactivated sports clubs, and national and international sports competitions have been delayed or canceled. This study aims to explore the effect of these restrictions on the psychological condition of athletes. This research uses the descriptive analysis method by surveying to obtain information from the respondents. There are three things to examine (i.e. athletes' feelings about the condition, how they deal with negative feelings that arise, and the actions they take during restriction). The subjects of this study were 179 athletes from 22 sports associations managed by regional governments and sports committees. The survey method was used in this research. Open questionnaires are sent to athletes to fill out. The results can be used as a recommendation for coaches and the government.

### Introduction

Covid-19 has caused pandemics around the world. In order to stop the spread of the disease, the restrictive regulations imposed by most governments have disrupted people's daily lives, including in sports. The restrictive situation experienced worldwide has caused many athletes to adapt their sports training without the appropriate tools or space to develop their training routines properly. In addition, restrictions imposed by health authorities to prevent the spread of the virus have caused a number of national and international competitions have been postponed or canceled.

The government's policy regarding these sudden and special restrictions against Covid-19, might lead to an unwanted situation. This condition can have negative consequences

at the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral levels. Periods of inactivity, isolation from sports teams, distance from the sports community, inadequate interactions with coaches, and lack of social support have also been shown to cause emotional distress and psychological distress in athletes (Reardon et al., 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic has created new mental health stressors for everyone; for athletes, this has been discussed in recent publications (Edwards & Singh, 2020; Edwards & Thornton, 2020; Mehrsafari et al., 2020).

This uncertain situation requires athletes to adapt quickly. When athletes can't adapt to a stressful environment, athletes will complain of mental health problems such as stress, depression, depression, and even panic (Foskett & Longstaff, 2018; Gulliver et al., 2012;

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Henriksen et al., 2020; Moreland et al., 2018). For most athletes, this sudden disruption in the training schedule will cause them to set new goals during the situation. Some athletes may develop the potential to cope with this unexpected condition. However, some other athletes may experience negative responses over several weeks to months. Individuals can respond differently to emotional distress caused by traumatic events such as this pandemic (Killgore et al., 2020). Research has shown that this situation can have adverse psychological effects such as symptoms of post-traumatic stress, confusion, and anger (Brooks et al., 2020).

Changes in training routines and the absence of regular competition, unlike in previous years, can negatively impact the motivation of athletes. Athletes may lose their motivation to keep training due to unpredictable competition. Some may still do the exercises, but not use various alternative ways to complete the training program limitations. It may be done just to meet external demands. On the other hand, perhaps, there are athletes who begin to lose the desire to participate because they feel less able to maintain active training in a program (many cannot be done) and may also think that it is meaningless because there is no competition and will not produce the results they hoped for (always failing to hit the target or due to injury sustained).

In fact, emotional changes, such as worry, anxiety, and stress are common responses when faced with a pandemic situation. It is a form of self-defense mechanism or a sign that there is a threat we are facing. However, if it is excessive, it will disturb the psychological state of the individual, such as experiencing depression (Agung, 2020). It can become even more disturbing to the psychological condition if the policy on restricting activities is prolonged due to the decline in cases of Covid 19 sufferers. This significant impact requires action and appropriate research from the field of sport. In addition, to prevent the physical consequences for athletes of restriction, research is needed to understand the actual psychological impact.

In Indonesia, there have been several studies on the psychological impact of the Covid 19 pandemic. However, they only focusing on

the motivation of athletes, both achievement motivation and motivation to improve physical condition during the pandemic. Therefore, this study explores the psychological impact of activity restriction due to the pandemic on athletes. Three main points are explored, including 1) athletes' feelings regarding the situation they are experiencing, 2) coping strategies that have been used to overcome disturbing feelings, and 3) actions or efforts that have been made in overcoming limitations due to the Covid 19 pandemic. It is hoped that it can provide benefits for fostering athlete achievement through intervention programs that are per the needs and the application of a supportive training environment.

The emergence of various emotional responses from athletes regarding this limitation situation is the basis for the need to be carried out regarding the actual emotional states experienced by athletes. Knowing the condition of the feeling felt is important information for coaches and sports administrators. The goal is that coaches can adjust the appropriate treatment imposed on athletes according to their needs. For example, whether many athletes are depressed, just lose motivation or even more athletes who are not psychologically disturbed. So that by knowing the general description of the conditions felt psychological, coaches and sports management can find out the right policy in planning the next athlete coaching program.

## Method

This research uses the descriptive analysis method by conducting a survey to obtain information from the respondents. There are 179 athletes involved in this study (80 girls, 99 boys) from 22 sports managed by the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Tourism, Central Java Province, and the Indonesian National Sports Committee, Central Java Province. The research participants were 13 to 33 years old and were potential athletes who participated in the national championships. These athletes are members of several sports teams, including the Development of Long-Term Sports Centers (DLTSC), Student Sports Education and Training Centers (SSETC), College Education and Training Centers (CETC), and Regional

Training Centers (RTC).

This study used an open questionnaire to collect data. It consists of three question points to be answered in writing by the respondent. The use of opened questionnaires in this study aims to obtain complete information about the conditions experienced by respondents. Through an open questionnaire, respondents can fill in according to their wishes or circumstances, so various data are obtained. The questions in this questionnaire include 1) "What was your feeling when the restrictions caused many competitions to be canceled/postponed?"; 2) "What are you doing to overcome the unpleasant feelings and negative thoughts that have caused Covid 19?"; 3) "What was your reaction when restrictions were imposed causing many training facilities to close?". The first question is related to the perceived affection, the second question is related to possible coping strategies to overcome the affections that arise, and the third question is related to alternative actions/solutions taken. The questionnaires distribution starts from February 17 to March 31, 2021, with the hope that quite a number of respondents can participate in this research.

The data collected is then analyzed through several steps. The first step is referred to as data verification, such as checking the completeness of filling, data legibility, and conformity of the respondent's answer to the question. The second step is coding, which is the provision of codes for each data belonging to the same category. Next, the third step is tabulation to create tables containing data that has been coded according to the required analysis. (analysis based on specific characteristics of respondents). The last step is the data presentation. For the data to be easy to read and understand, the next data is displayed in tables.

## Results And Discussion

A total of 179 athletes from various sports, various sports teams, and various ages were involved in this study. The detailed characteristics of the number of respondents can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that the subjects in this study.

mostly were athletes from RTC, and the least number were athletes from CETC. Meanwhile, athletes from DLTSC and SSETC are more or less the same, which is about 25 percent. The age range category is based on the Indonesian Ministry of Health (Departemen Kesehatan RI, 2009). The three age categories are: 1) Early adolescence: 12-16 years, 2) Late adolescence: 17-25 years, and 3) Early adulthood: 26-35 years. Most subjects were between 17-25 years old, and the least were 26-33 years old. Athletes heavily involved in this study are athletics, hockey, Pencak silat, bicycle racing, handball, and Tarung Derajat.

The data are further described based on the following questions: 1) athletes' feelings related to the situations experienced, 2) coping strategies used in overcoming disturbing feelings, 3) actions or efforts made to overcome limitations due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Data from 179 participants were then verified to check the suitability of the answer to the question. In the first question about the emotions felt, five answers were found that were illegible and did not match the questions. In the second question, all the answers match. In the third question, seven do not match. The next step is coding the answers that pass the verification. They are grouped into the same themes or categories. Based on the results of the respondents' answers coding to the first question, we found several types of emotions/affections felt by athletes due to activity restrictions, presented in Table 2

Tabel 1. Respondents Characteristics

No	Sports	Sports Team												Frequency	
		DLTSC			SSETC			CETC			RTC				
		A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C		
1	Fencing				2							2			4
2	Athletics	9			4	1		4				24	5		47
3	Bike Racing	4										9			13
4	Handball	5			8										13
5	Volleyball				3										3
6	Wrestling											1			1
7	Hockey											18	3		21
8	Judo				1							1			2
9	Karate				2										2
10	Archery				5							1			6
11	Rock Climbing				1										1
12	Martials Arts	7			3			4							14
13	Swimming				2										2
14	Soccer				4										4
15	Sepak Takraw				3								2		5
16	Table Tennis	3			1			3							7
17	Taekwondo				1							8			9
18	Tarung Derajat											10	1		11
19	Tennis Court	5													5
20	Boxing				2										2
21	Sand Volleyball											5			5
22	Wushu	2													2
<b>Total</b>		<b>35</b>			<b>42</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>11</b>				<b>79</b>	<b>11</b>		<b>179</b>

DLTSC: Development of Long-Term Sports Centers; SSETC: Student Sports Education and Training Centers; CETC: College Education and Training Centers; RTC: Regional Training Centers; A: Age 13-16; B: Age 17-25; C: Age 25-35

Table 2. Athletes' Feelings Related To Restriction Situation

Feelings Experienced	Frequency	Percent
Frustration	2	1.1
Anxious	3	1.7
Sad	50	28.7
Dissappointed	75	43.1
Just Ordinary/Keep calm	9	5.2
Unhappy	8	4.6
Angry/Annoyed	2	1.1
Happy	8	4.6
Confused	2	1.1
Loss of enthusiasm	5	2.9
Uncertain	8	4.6
Bored	2	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Primary Data, 2021

Table 2 shows that many athletes feel disappointed and sad. Some feel uncertainty, anger, displeasure, boredom, confusion, anxiety, and some even get frustrated. However, some athletes feel normal, and some are happy with the restrictions caused by Covid 19. The various negative emotions felt by these athletes were caused by several things related to competition, training, and policies. Regarding the match, the entire calendar of match activities is canceled or postponed indefinitely. It gives rise to negative feelings in the athlete. Many athletes miss the opportunity to take part in the match dreamed and planned. Some athletes feel that their training preparations are futile. There are some athletes who have applied for study leave just to prepare for the competition. But it turns out that it has to be canceled, and not clear when the competition will be held. So they feel that there are no more targets to be achieved.

Regarding training, many athletes complain that they cannot do the exercises because the facilities are closed, the lack of facilities and equipment, no coach to correct them, and no training partners. They cannot measure the progress of ability / achievement. Furthermore, related to policy. A number of athletes regretted the uncertainty of how the restrictions ended. According to them, the government should have been able to establish several policies related to the match implementation so that the competition could be held again soon.

On the other hand, restrictions due to Covid 19 do not cause negative emotions for some athletes. They have a beneficial view of policy and the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some athletes think that any government policy is well-intentioned and

has been carefully considered for the safety of athletes and coaches. According to them, the policy must be accepted and implemented. Others feel that although activities are limited, many things can be done. So they choose to be patient and grateful. Several athletes feel happy because of this pandemic. Some athletes think that with a matching delay, they still have plenty of time to train and improve. Interestingly, some athletes are grateful. Because of the pandemic of Covid 19, they can learn about the meaning of life.

It may be since most of the athletes involved in this study were not novice athletes, but rather experienced athletes participating in competitions. It causes the level of perceived psychological disturbance tends to be negative. They may be worried about their performance development due to various restrictions that interfere with their practice. They are also concerned about their opponents, who may continue to train due to differences in the policy of implementing restrictions in their area. It can trigger pre-competition anxiety. As found in the results that beginner athletes experience significantly less psychological stress than those who do not (Sullivan et al., 2019). Several studies have found that starter athletes reported significantly lower levels of pre-competitive state anxiety than non-starter athletes (Han et al., 2011; Wolf et al., 2015), and starter athletes viewed state anxiety as more facilitative than non-starters (Wolf et al., 2015). Furthermore, based on the results of the respondent's answer coding to the second question, the coping strategies carried out by the subject in overcoming the negative feelings that arise are as in Table 3.

**Table 3. Coping Strategies Used in Overcoming Disturbing Feelings**

Feelings Experienced	Frequency	Percentage
Trying to maintain health	22	12.3
Doing Fun Activities	52	29.1
Think Positively (Take meaning from Situation)	31	17.3
Focus on Lige Goals	8	4.5
Doing spiritual activities	8	4.5
Keep thinking about doing the exercise	40	22.3
Fun Fantasies	2	1.1
Looking for information about covid 19	2	1.1
Sharing with friends to reduce anxiety/stress	2	1.1
Be alone	1	0.6
Avoid news about covid 19	4	2.2
Just ordinary (not affected)	7	3.9
Total	179	100

Source: Primary Data, 2021

In dealing with the stressors associated with this situation, athletes need to employ a coping strategies variation. In sports psychology, coping has been achieved through a trait approach, which suggests that individuals have a stable coping style in dealing with stress (Penley et al., 2002). Table 3 shows the ways athletes deal with problems related to negative feelings that arise are very diverse. Most of the subjects overcome these negative feelings by entertaining themselves. Based on the coding results, we found that athletes entertain themselves by doing various fun activities. Such as playing games, being active on social media, watching movies, watching television, reading books/comics/novels/magazines, listening to music, doing activities according to hobbies, cycling, and taking a walk to enjoy the natural environment. Most athletes still think about being able to do training and carry out targeted programs. Most of them keep thinking about the exercise. They worried that their ability decreased if they didn't exercise. They are also afraid that if the race has started, they will lose to their opponents if they don't exercise. They believe that their current opponents will also continue to train.

Some athletes try to overcome the negative feelings that arise by continuing to try to maintain their health in various ways, such as consuming vitamins, moderate exercise, and following the health protocol set by the government. Many athletes also try to overcome

negative feelings by thinking positively. A number of these athletes change the negative thoughts that arise by taking advantage of the situation, such as by having their competition postponed so they have more time to train. Athletes with injuries have time to recover before the competition starts again. Athletes have time to do activities they like and have lots of time with their families. So they pay more attention to their health through food and rest.

Among the participants, some try to calm themselves down spiritually. They choose to increase their worship and think that the situation they are experiencing is a test from God. Some others are just not bothered and do things as usual. However, some feel stressed and need help from other friends in overcoming the anxiety they are experiencing. Personality dimensions such as neuroticism and extraversion can determine an athlete's style in dealing with sports-related stress (Kaiseler et al., 2012). In addition to personality, motivation and the level of social support that athletes themselves feel can also help support elite athletes from stress associated with elite competition (Fletcher and Sarkar, 2012).

Social support obtained by athletes can come from their families, fellow athletes, and most importantly, from coaches. It is well known that coaching style is associated with stress and fatigue in athletes (Isoard-Gauthier et al., 2012). Likewise, a study has highlighted that coaching styles, such as teaching perceived

as poor or uncaring, are associated with their coping and motivation for sports (Gearity & Murray, 2011). Therefore, in a difficult situation, the psychological condition felt by the athlete could be caused by the interaction between the

athlete and the coach during the restriction period. Then the last is the result of coding the respondent's answer to the third question. It is known that the athletes' actions when the policy made almost all sports facilities closed

**Table 4. Actions Made to Overcome Limitations Due to the Covid Pandemic 19**

Action	Frequency	Percent
No Exercise	9	5.3
Look for an alternative place to exercise	31	18.0
Do Other entertaining activities	36	20.9
Do the exercise at home	71	41.3
Make own training tools	25	14.5
Total	179	100

Source: Primary Data, 2021

The government policy to close public sports facilities, repatriate some athletes in training camps, and prohibit sports activities in clubs, makes many athletes confused about what actions to take during this enforcement. Most athletes choose to keep doing exercises at home or around the house. Several athletes who train at home use standardized sports equipment according to their sport. However, many are trains without equipment. They choose to do a home exercise program that does not require special equipment.

Even though many are closed, some athletes are still trying to find a place that can be used to train. Several choices of training venues include an open field in the home environment and renting several places to use for training with friends. Some others try to make their training facilities, make exercise equipment with various materials, and modify training equipment. Some of the participants chose to do other activities that were entertaining because of the difficulty of doing the exercises. They also do this to overcome boredom. Some of the activities carried out include cycling, walking in the neighborhood, focusing on school, working, doing homework, and playing. However, some athletes feel confused, don't know what to do, and finally choose not to exercise.

Based on the data collected, it is known that athletes' responses to unexpected situations vary widely. Many negative feelings arise, but there are also positive feelings experienced by the subject. Athletes' strategies for coping with

emerging negative feelings also vary. Their efforts include staying focused on training programs, some focusing on their life goals, choosing to maintain their health, trying to take lessons from the situation, avoiding news about Covid 19, some even staying calm, but some are looking for help from friend to calm their anxiety. The actions they took as a result of the restriction were varied, such as continuing to exercise at home, looking for other exercise sites, building their training facilities, doing other entertaining activities, or simply choosing not to exercise.

The findings from this study can be recommendation material for trainers and the government. Since athletes from training camps have been discharged, coaches are advised to regularly monitor their physical condition, the extent to which they can exercise, whether there is decreased ability, and so on. Trainers are also required to maintain communication with athletes and provide motivation for athletes. The trainer must also understand the various limitations experienced by each athlete and provide a training program based on them. Coaches also need to start preparing a new training program to prepare their athletes when activities return to normal and competitions can take place. And most importantly, coaches should begin to apply training programs that stimulate the athletes' mental toughness. It is because mental toughness is a vital aspect of elite sports competition. Research has shown that mental toughness is a valuable resource that helps athletes "rise" through adversity and

stress (Hermahayu, 2021).

For policymakers, the results of this study can be used as material for consideration in collaborating with the sports committee and the primary sports branch in compiling a competition health protocol standard so that the competition can be held immediately. The government can also establish several policies regarding the reopening of various public sports facilities, as well as reactivating training centers. The most important thing to recommend from these findings is that in the future, sports committees and parent sports should provide mental strengthening programs for athletes. Athletes need to be taught how to manage emotions and coping strategies that must be done when facing bad situations or unexpected situations. It is vital to maintain the stability of the psychological aspects of the athlete, which in turn can support the achievement of optimal performance

## Conclusions

The dominant emotions felt by athletes due to activity restrictions in the Covid 19 pandemic are sadness and disappointment. The coping strategies used by most subjects in dealing with negative feelings that arise include entertaining themselves, keeping thinking about doing exercises, thinking positively (taking lessons from existing situations), and trying to maintain health. Furthermore, the actions taken by most athletes when the restriction policy was enforced and made almost all sports facilities closed and sports clubs disabled were to continue practicing at home, looking for alternative training venues, making their training facilities, choosing to do other activities that sleep, some even choose not to exercise. The research results can become a recommendation material for trainers in developing achievement development programs both physically and psychologically. Besides, it can also be recommendation material for the government to formulate policies related to the implementation of competitions and sports activities by the health protocol.

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