

How and when do athletes seek mental health support?

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<u>Step of framework</u>	<u>Is this a focus of the scoping review?</u>	<u>How it maps onto the scoping review & inclusion criteria OR rationale for not being a focus of the review</u>
1) Awareness and appraisal of problems	No	<i>The review is focused on the athletes' past experiences or future intentions of seeking support not on their self-awareness</i>
2) Expression of symptoms and need for support	Yes	Experiences of expressing their need for support to formal or semi-formal sources (e.g., within healthcare, the sporting context and higher education)
3) Availability of sources of help	Yes	Access to mental health support from formal and semi-formal sources (e.g., within healthcare, the sporting context and the higher education system)
4) Willingness to seek out and disclose to sources	Yes	Experiences of seeking help from formal and semi-formal sources (e.g., within healthcare, the sporting context and the higher education system)

Rickwood and et al (2005) help-seeking framework and how it maps onto this scoping review and the inclusion criteria. Credit: *BMJ Open* (2023). DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2022-062279

Athletes' experience of using mental health support—and their attitudes towards these services—could be better understood with a more robust approach to research.

Experts at the University of Birmingham's School of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences, plan to assess current studies on athletes' mental health help-seeking, suggesting that research to consolidate existing

knowledge was a necessary next step.

Athletes are less likely to seek help for [mental health issues](#) than non-athletes, and can also face challenges including a lack of access to services or previous negative experiences when seeking help.

While researchers understand the sources of support available—including those available in healthcare, sporting contexts and higher education systems, how athletes access these and their experience of them is less well understood.

Since athletes' help-seeking for mental health is a relatively new area of research, a review of existing studies that could inform future research directions would be an important next step as new evidence is emerging continually.

The [protocol](#), published in *BMJ Open*, outlines plans for a scoping review, leading to clearer identification of gaps in the [knowledge base](#) and suggestions for further research.

Kirsty Brown, who led the research, said, "Athletes are known to have similar rates of issues such as anxiety, depression and eating disorders as the [general population](#), yet they have lower rates of help-seeking for [mental health](#). It's likely, therefore, that a significant proportion of athletes are not getting the help they need and so it's really important that we understand how and when athletes are looking for help, and what their experience of using services is."

The *BMJ Open* protocol sets out clear stages for a comprehensive program of research which includes an investigation of how easy athletes believe it is to access services; how willing they are to seek out support and whether the preference would be to get help from inside the sport environment or turn to coaches for help.

More information: Kirsty R Brown et al, Athletes' access to, attitudes towards and experiences of help-seeking for mental health: a scoping review protocol, *BMJ Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2022-062279](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2022-062279)

Provided by University of Birmingham

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