



Determinantes psicológicos del rendimiento en el fútbol femenino: una revisión sistemática sobre resiliencia, ansiedad, motivación y cohesión

Psychological determinants of performance in women's football: a systematic review on resilience, anxiety, motivation and cohesion

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Abstract

Introduction: Over the past decade, women's football has gained significant visibility, leading to increased attention on the psychological factors that influence players' performance. Mental toughness is identified as a key trait that allows athletes to remain focused and resilient in high-pressure environments.

Objective: This systematic review aims to analyze the psychological determinants of performance in young women's football, focusing on mental toughness, anxiety management, motivation, and team cohesion.

Methodology: This review followed PRISMA guidelines and systematically searched four databases (PubMed, ProQuest, SCOPUS, FECYT) for articles published before October 1, 2024. The PICO framework was applied to define the research question, and data were extracted into an Excel spreadsheet, a total of 11 articles met all the inclusion criteria and were included in the final qualitative synthesis.

Results: anxiety is explored in five studies, highlighting its physiological and psychological effects on performance and its predictors in elite athletes; resilience is examined in three studies, focusing on how young female athletes adapt to adversity to enhance performance and life skills; motivation is the subject of six studies, emphasizing intrinsic and extrinsic factors driving engagement, performance, and social influences in sports; and team cohesion is analyzed in two studies, illustrating its role in fostering better performance perceptions and group dynamics.

Conclusions: Coaching strategies that foster a positive motivational climate and incorporate mental skills training can enhance psychological resilience, motivation, and performance outcomes.

Keywords

Psychological resilience; anxiety; motivation; soccer and athletic performance

Resumen

Introducción: En la última década, el fútbol femenino ha ganado una visibilidad significativa, lo que ha llevado a una mayor atención sobre los factores psicológicos que influyen en el rendimiento de las jugadoras. La fortaleza mental se identifica como un rasgo clave que permite a las atletas permanecer concentradas y resilientes en entornos de alta presión.

Objetivo: Esta revisión sistemática tiene como objetivo analizar los determinantes psicológicos del rendimiento en el fútbol femenino joven, centrándose en la fortaleza mental, el manejo de la ansiedad, la motivación y la cohesión del equipo.

Metodología: Esta revisión siguió las pautas PRISMA y buscó sistemáticamente cuatro bases de datos (PubMed, ProQuest, SCOPUS, FECYT) en busca de artículos publicados antes del 1 de octubre de 2024. Se aplicó el marco PICO para definir la pregunta de investigación y los datos se extrajeron en una hoja de cálculo de Excel. Un total de 11 artículos cumplieron con todos los criterios de inclusión y se incluyeron en la síntesis cualitativa final.

Resultados: la ansiedad se explora en cinco estudios, destacando sus efectos fisiológicos y psicológicos sobre el rendimiento y sus predictores en atletas de élite; la resiliencia se examina en tres estudios, centrándose en cómo las atletas jóvenes se adaptan a la adversidad para mejorar el rendimiento y las habilidades para la vida; es el tema de seis estudios, enfatizando los factores intrínsecos y extrínsecos que impulsan la motivación, el compromiso, el rendimiento y las influencias sociales en los deportes; y la cohesión del equipo se analiza en dos estudios, ilustrando su papel en el fomento de mejores percepciones del rendimiento y la dinámica de grupo.

Conclusiones: Las estrategias de entrenamiento que fomentan un clima motivacional positivo e incorporan el entrenamiento de habilidades mentales pueden mejorar la resiliencia psicológica, la motivación y los resultados de rendimiento.

Palabras clave

Resiliencia; ansiedad; motivación; fútbol y rendimiento físico.

Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been significant growth in women's football in terms of visibility, match-day attendance, and TV audiences. More women's football matches are being televised, leading to greater exposure and visibility. Major broadcasters and streaming services have started to invest more in women's sports, which has amplified the reach to global audiences (Valenti et al., 2024). Events like the FIFA Women's World Cup, UEFA Women's Champions League, and domestic leagues such as the Women's Super League (WSL) have attracted record-breaking viewership (Valenti et al., 2020). This growth has not only boosted the visibility of the sport but has also fostered a sense of pride and empowerment for women in football (Blundell et al., 2024). It shows how far the game has come, though there is still progress to be made for achieving equality with the men's game in terms of resources and recognition (Culvin et al., 2022). In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of mental resilience, defined as the ability to adapt positively to adversity (Mcmanama O'Brien et al., 2021). For young female football players, the development of mental toughness, that refers to a set of psychological attributes that enable players to consistently perform at their best, cope effectively with pressure, and bounce back from challenges or setbacks, both on and off the field, is essential to achieving and maintaining high levels of performance (Pettersen et al., 2023a). Studies have shown that athletes who exhibit higher levels of mental toughness tend to perform better in stressful competitive environments, while those who struggle to manage anxiety often see their performance suffer (Bédard Thom et al., 2021; -López et al., 2022).

In women's soccer, the Big Five personality traits play a significant role in shaping performance and team dynamics: Openness fosters creativity and adaptability, allowing players to embrace new strategies and challenges; Conscientiousness drives discipline, reliability, and consistent effort on and off the field; Extraversion enhances communication, energy, and leadership, contributing to positive team morale; Agreeableness promotes cooperation, teamwork, and harmony among players; while Neuroticism, when low, supports emotional resilience and composure under pressure, though high levels may lead to stress and anxiety that require careful management (Atrizka & Pratama, 2022; Gupta & McCarthy, 2022; Pettersen et al., 2023a). Players with greater mental toughness have been shown to handle stress more effectively and maintain a higher level of performance under pressure (Hsieh et al., 2024). Athletes with high resilience are more likely to maintain focus and motivation, which is essential in a competitive and demanding sport like football. Another critical factor is anxiety management. Football matches, particularly at elite levels, can be stressful, and many players experience performance anxiety, which, if left unmanaged, can lead to suboptimal performance (Madsen et al., 2022a). Research indicates that cognitive strategies, such as goal-setting and positive self-talk, can help mitigate the negative effects of anxiety (Gomes et al., 2022). Studies have also shown that elite female players with more experience tend to exhibit lower anxiety levels, indicating that experience and exposure to high-pressure situations may play a role in anxiety regulation (Sarmiento et al., 2021).

Motivation is another psychological aspect that significantly affects performance. Players who are driven by intrinsic motivation—such as a love for the sport and a desire for personal improvement—tend to engage more fully in training and perform better in matches compared to those who are primarily motivated by external factors (Fishbach & Woolley, 2022; Malone & Lepper, 2021). Coaches play a crucial role in fostering a positive motivational climate by encouraging autonomy and emphasizing personal development over outcomes, which has been shown to enhance intrinsic motivation in athletes (Haugen et al., 2020). Finally, team cohesion is essential for success in football, a sport that relies heavily on coordination and collaboration between players (Marcelino et al., 2020). A strong sense of team cohesion, characterized by mutual trust and support, has been linked to better communication on the field, higher morale, and ultimately, improved team performance. Teams that foster a positive and inclusive atmosphere tend to perform better as players feel more supported and engaged, which translates into better collective efforts (de Jong et al., 2023).

Although there is increasing recognition of the importance of psychological factors in women's football, the body of research remains limited compared to studies on male athletes (Popovych et al., 2021). Another important variable is team cohesion. Team cohesion has emerged as a critical factor in the success of women's soccer, reflecting the increasing focus on psychological and interpersonal dynamics in sports (Szabadics et al., 2024). As the global visibility and competitiveness of women's soccer rise, so

does the understanding that a team's collective synergy significantly impacts performance (Hague et al., 2021). Team cohesion—defined as the shared commitment, trust, and unity among players—has been identified as essential for fostering effective communication, mutual support, and resilience during high-pressure situations (González-Ponce et al., 2022). Modern coaching approaches emphasize creating a cohesive team environment to optimize both individual and group performance (Szabadics et al., 2024). Research indicates that cohesive teams not only perform better on the field but also exhibit stronger morale, reduced conflict, and greater adaptability to challenges (Pappalardo et al., 2021). There is a need for longitudinal studies that track psychological development over time, from youth through professional levels, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how psychological traits evolve and influence performance throughout a football career (Benítez-Sillero et al., 2021).

The aim of this paper is to systematically review and synthesize the existing research on psychological factors affecting performance in young women's football. By examining mental toughness, anxiety management, motivation, and team cohesion, this review seeks to highlight the key psychological attributes that contribute to success in the sport. Furthermore, the paper will explore how coaches and support systems can leverage these psychological factors to enhance both individual and team performance. Given the limited research on psychological factors in women's football, this review aims to fill the existing gaps and provide insights that can be applied to the development of female athletes at various levels of competition.

Method

Experimental Approach to the Problem

A systematic review was conducted following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (Page et al., 2021) as well as the established protocols for conducting systematic reviews in the field of sport sciences (Rico-González et al., 2021a).

Information sources

A comprehensive search was conducted across four databases (PubMed, ProQuest, SCOPUS, and FECYT, including Web of Science, CCC, CIDW, KJD, MEDLINE, RSCI, and SCIELO) to locate articles published before October 1, 2024. There was no search in gray literature databases.

Search Strategy

The PICO framework (Patient, Problem, or Population – Intervention or Exposure – Comparison, Control, or Comparator – Outcome[s]) was utilized to clearly define the research question. When feasible, the search was restricted to scientific articles and journals, as well as language (refer to exclusion criteria number 5). The author was aware of the journal names and manuscript authors. The search terms applied are listed in Table 1 (Rico-González et al., 2021b):

("youth women" OR "youth woman") AND (resilience OR anxiety OR "team cohesion" OR motivation OR "mental health") AND (soccer OR football) AND (performance OR development OR competition).

Eligibility criteria

To extract information from the articles, the author downloaded details (title, authors, date, and database) and transferred them into an Excel spreadsheet (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA, USA), where duplicates were removed. The remaining articles were then screened based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1). Additionally, any relevant articles not initially identified were similarly screened, and studies meeting the criteria were included and labeled as "included from external sources."

Table 1. Inclusion/exclusion criteria of included studies

Item	Inclusion	Exclusion	Search coherence
Population	Young women	Women out of youth categories	youth women and youth woman
Intervention or Exposure	Measuring psychological factors	Not measuring psychological factors.	resilience or anxiety or "team cohesion" or motivation or "mental health"
Comparison	Comparing psychological factors with their performance in competition	Articles that measured psychological factor but it was not compared with competition	Performance or development or competition



Outcome[s]	Measures related to soccer	Variables no related to soccer	Soccer or football
Study design	No restriction	-	-
Other criteria	Peer reviewed, original, full-text studies written in English or Spanish.	Written in another language or non-peer reviewed original full text studies.	-

Data extraction

Data extraction was carried out using an Excel spreadsheet, following the Cochrane Consumers and Communication Review Group's data extraction template (Rico-González et al., 2021b). The spreadsheet was employed to evaluate the inclusion and exclusion criteria for all selected studies. Full-text articles that were excluded from the analysis were documented along with the reasons for their exclusion. All records were maintained within the spreadsheet.

Risk of Bias

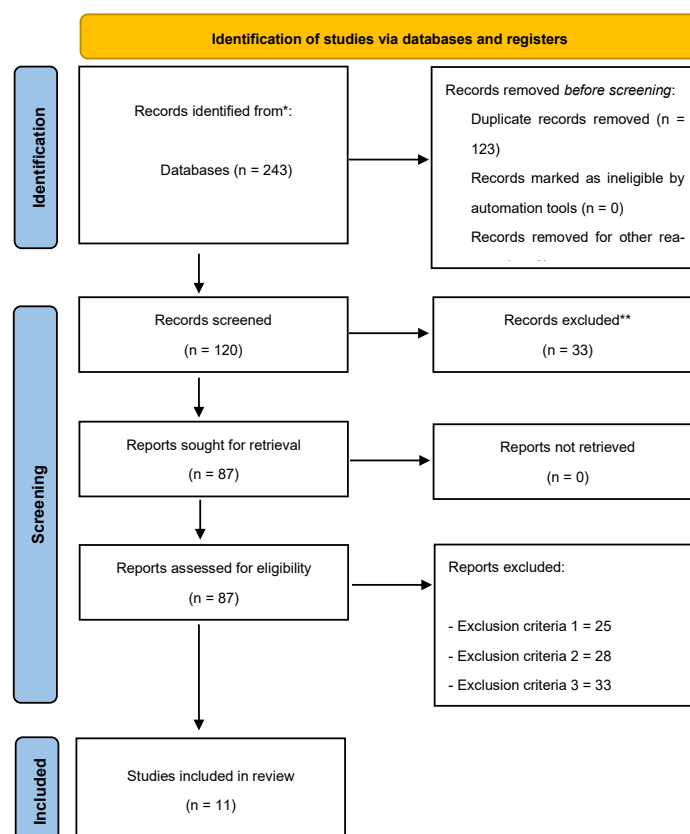
The methodological quality was evaluated using the Cochrane Risk of Bias (RoBVis) tool in a systematic review (McGuinness & Higgins, 2021), and data analysis was conducted with RevMan 5.3. The overall quality of the evidence was appraised using the Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development, and Evaluation (GRADE) framework. The RoBVis checklist evaluates the following criteria in colours (Green = High; Yellow = Some Concerns; Red = Low).

Results

Identification and selection of studies

A total of 243 (Web of Science: 75; PubMed: 68; ProQuest: 45; SCOPUS: 55) original articles were found, of which 123 were duplicates. Thus, a total of 120 unique articles were identified. After checking titles and abstracts, 33 articles were excluded because they did not meet inclusion criteria number five. The full text of the remaining 87 articles was then analyzed; 25, 28, and 33 articles were excluded because they did not meet exclusion criteria number one, two, and four, respectively. Thus, a total of 11 articles met all the inclusion criteria and were included in the final qualitative synthesis (Figure 1).

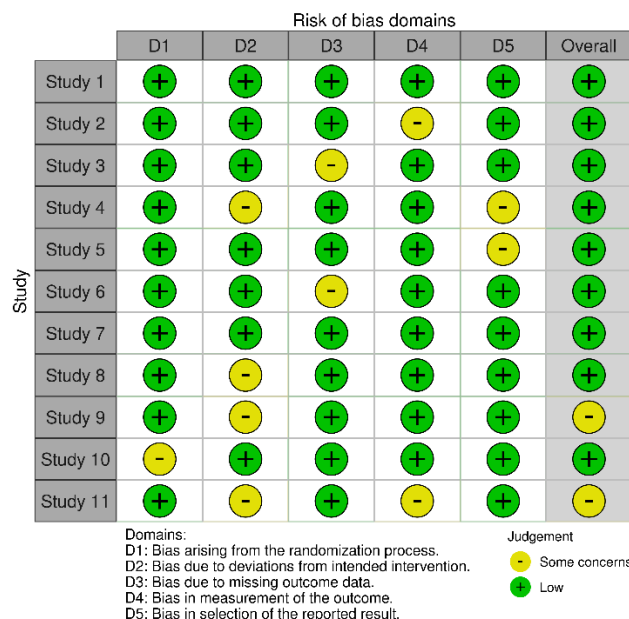
Figure 1. Flow diagram of the study



Quality assessment

The quality assessment for this systematic review can be found in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Quality of included studies.



Note: The RoBVis checklist evaluates the following criteria in colours (Green = High; Yellow = Some Concerns; Red = Low).

Identification and selection of studies

The characteristics of studies were extracted and clustered into the table 2.

Table 2. Articles included in review

Authors/year	Age	Findings	Methodology	Outcome measured	Findings
1. (Madsen et al., 2022b)	Age range: 16 to 34 years old, mean age of 21.14 (SD = 3.61)	180 women soccer players	Quantitative Study. The questionnaire battery included demographic information and measures of psychological variables, including the Achievement Motive Scale-Sport, the Competitive Trait Anxiety-Questionnaire, and the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2.	Somatic state anxiety 2) Cognitive state anxiety 3) Self-confidence	In conclusion, psychological characteristics and national team experience both play a crucial role in managing state anxiety before important matches in elite-level women's football.
2. (Botelho et al., 2020)	Age range: 20-31 years old, with 13 players between 20-26 years old and 11 between 26-31 years old	24 women soccer players	Quantitative Study. The preseason training program lasted 7 weeks, with 42 sessions totaling 84 training hours. Measurements were taken at the beginning (PRE) and end (END) of the preseason, including self-rated questionnaire, anthropometric assessment, internal training load, salivary cortisol and testosterone, blood creatine kinase, heart rate variability, and mood states.	Blood creatine kinase (CK) concentration - Salivary cortisol concentration - Salivary testosterone concentration - Mood states (tension, depression, anger, fatigue, mental confusion, and total mood score) - Heart rate variability (HRV) indices	A 7-week preseason training period for elite female soccer players increased negative mood states and physiological stress markers, but the overall training load was not high enough to induce nonfunctional overreaching or overtraining syndrome.
3. (Kristjánsdóttir et al., 2019)	Mean age of 23.5 ± 3.5 years	142 women soccer players	Quantitative Study. Participants completed 3 questionnaires: Test of Performance Strategies (TOPS), Sport Mental Toughness Questionnaire (SMTQ), and Sport Anxiety Scale-2 (SAS-2) - Descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA with Bonferroni post-hoc tests, and a multivariate classification tree analysis were used to analyze the data	Differences in psychological skills, mental toughness, and anxiety between women's football players at the national team, first division, and second division levels. Ability to predict the players' levels (national team, first division, second division) using a multivariate model based on their psychological skills, mental toughness, and anxiety.	Considering the significant impact of psychological attributes on women football players' performance, integrating sports psychologists into national and club teams is essential for improving diagnosis, interventions, and talent detection.

h. (Ling et al., 2023)	Not mentioned	560 women soccer players	Quantitative Study. An online survey distributed to retired elite women's soccer players in the US - Use of validated questionnaires to evaluate 5 health domains: general, musculoskeletal, reproductive endocrinology, post-concussion, and mental - Eligibility criteria of having played at the college, semi-professional, professional, or national team level - Descriptive statistics and comparisons across player characteristics using ANOVA and chi-square tests	1. General health, including physical and mental health status (measured using the PROMIS-10 Global Health scale) 2. Musculoskeletal health, including joint function (measured using the SANE score) and surgical history 3. Reproductive endocrinology, including menstrual function, hormonal contraceptive use, and disordered eating 4. Post-concussion symptoms (measured using the Post-Concussion Symptom Scale) 5. Mental health, including anxiety (measured using the GAD-7) and depression (measured using the PHQ-4)	Given the sex and gender disparity, this study focusing on women's soccer can serve as a precedent for other sports with similar health risks and benefits. Health concerns include musculoskeletal injuries, post-concussion symptoms, and lower mental health in the early years following retirement.
i. (Morales-Sánchez et al., 2022)	Age range: 14-19 years	113 participants total, with 50 female and 63 male participants.	Quantitative Study. 6 soccer teams in the provinces of Malaga and Granada - Measures: - Sociodemographic questionnaire - Competition Anxiety State Inventory-2 (CSAI-2) - Perceived Motivational Climate in Sport Questionnaire-2 (PMCSQ-2) - Self-confidence in Sport Competition Questionnaire (CACD) - Procedure: Coaches were contacted, informed consent was obtained, and participants completed the questionnaires online in the presence of a researcher.	1) Competitive anxiety (cognitive anxiety and somatic anxiety) 2) Self-confidence 3) Insecurity	Thus, the data obtained have corroborated a higher perception of ego-oriented and lower task-oriented motivational climate in girls. However, girls were notable because ego orientation has been related to lower confidence and higher insecurity than boys.
j. (Meyer-Parlapanis et al., 2017)	Mean age of 24 years (SD = 5 years)	90 women soccer players	Quantitative Study. Quasi-experimental design comparing premier league (n=44) and regional league (n=46) female football players - Questionnaires measuring: - Appetitive competition motivation (ACM) using an adapted Appetitive Aggression Scale - Gender role stereotypes, childhood play behavior, and upbringing style using visual analog scales	1. Appetitive competition motivation (ACM), defined as the desire to defeat an opponent independent of secondary reinforcing factors, in female football players from the premier and regional leagues. 2. The influence of social environments encouraging masculine and competitive play behavior on ACM. 3. The players' perceptions of their own gender role orientations and how this relates to ACM.	The study highlights appetitive competition motivation (ACM) as an important factor in the success of female football players, and that this ACM is influenced by socialization factors such as upbringing style and gender role orientation.
7. (McManama O'Brien et al., 2021)	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Systematic Review. Not mentioned (this paper does not describe any specific methodology, as it is a review article rather than a report of original research)	Not mentioned (this paper does not appear to have a specific "outcome measured" as it is a review paper rather than a primary research study)	Young female athletes often face challenges like disordered eating, body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and depression, highlighting the need to foster resilience for better stress coping and adaptation.
8. (Pettersen et al., 2023b)	Age range of 16 to 30 years, with a mean age of 21.43 years	156 women soccer players	Quantitative Study. Participants completed questionnaires on psychological factors including motivational climate, personality, mental toughness, grit, and self-regulated learning - Objective match performance data was collected from the InStat database - Linear mixed model analysis was used to examine the predictive value of the psychological factors on match performance	The primary outcome measured in this study is individual objective match performance, as measured by the InStat Index.	Coaches are crucial in fostering a mastery climate, and clubs should emphasize this in training programs. Extraversion is the only psychological trait linked to individual performance in women's football.
9. (Olmedilla et al., 2019)	Ages ranging from 13 to 17 years, with an average age of 15.53 years	108 women soccer players	Quantitative Study. The researchers used the Psychological Characteristics related to the Sport Performance Questionnaire (CPRD) and the	1. Psychological characteristics of young female soccer players, as measured by the Psychological Characteristics	The players' self-perception of their performance is very similar between match 1 and match 2, although



				Psychological Skills Inventory for Sports (PSIS) to assess the players' psychological characteristics. - The researchers also created a custom questionnaire to assess the players' and coaches' perceptions of the players' performance.	Related to Sport Performance Questionnaire (CPRD), including Stress Control, Influence of Performance Evaluation, Motivation, Team Cohesion, and Mental Skills. 2. Players' and coaches' perceptions of player performance in two specific matches, as measured by an ad hoc questionnaire. 3. Differences in these psychological characteristics and performance perceptions between the under-16 and under-18 age groups.	the small difference is significant in favor of match 1. The players' performance made by their coaches is somewhat higher than those made by the players themselves.
10.	(Pérez Muñoz et al., 2018)	Female football players aged 10-27 years, with a mean age of 15.21 ± 3.4 years	73 women soccer players	Quantitative Study. The methodology of the study involved the Alevín category to the Segunda División Nacional Femenina, using the Spanish version of the 35-item Participation Motivation Questionnaire (PMQ) on a 5-point Likert scale.	The primary outcome measured in this study is the motivations for women to play football, as assessed using the Participation Motivation Questionnaire (PMQ).	The main motivation for women to play football is intrinsic, related to enjoying the sport itself, while extrinsic motivations like popularity and social factors are less important.
	(Bojkowski, 2022)	Representing sports such as football, handball, hockey, volleyball, and basketball	49 women aged 19 to 32 years	Quantitative Study. The respondents completed the Inventory to Assess Psychological Gender (IPP) and the Polish adaptation of the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS).	It was determined that the psychological dimension of femininity was (in the male group) positively related to the dimension of amotivation, i.e., the lack of perception of a relationship between one's action and the outcome.	Psychological masculinity is strongly linked to overall external motivation and, notably, to internal motivation—the most desirable form of motivation—which includes components such as the motivation to learn, achieve, and seek stimulation.

Discussion

This systematic review integrates findings from various studies examining the psychological factors that influence performance in young women's football (Madsen et al., 2022a; Meyer-Parlapanis et al., 2017; Olmedilla et al., 2019; Pettersen et al., 2023a). The reviewed literature consistently highlights that mental toughness, self-confidence, anxiety management, motivation, and team cohesion are critical components in determining both individual and team success. These factors not only contribute to immediate performance outcomes but also play a significant role in the long-term development of young athletes. Anxiety is explored in five studies, highlighting its physiological and psychological effects on performance and its predictors in elite athletes; resilience is examined in three studies, focusing on how young female athletes adapt to adversity to enhance performance and life skills; motivation is the subject of six studies, emphasizing intrinsic and extrinsic factors driving engagement, performance, and social influences in sports; and team cohesion is analyzed in two studies, illustrating its role in fostering better performance perceptions and group dynamics.

Mental toughness is repeatedly identified as a key psychological attribute in elite sport, with studies showing that higher levels of mental toughness are directly correlated with better performance outcomes in women's football. Kristjánsdóttir et al. (2019), demonstrated that players at higher competitive levels, such as national teams, exhibit significantly greater mental toughness than those in lower divisions. Mental toughness allows athletes to maintain concentration, overcome performance pressure, and rebound from setbacks, all of which are essential in high-pressure environments like professional football. This attribute, closely linked to resilience, enables players to cope with challenges such as injuries, competitive stress, and external pressures, fostering a sustained high level of performance (Ling et al., 2023). Resilience, as discussed in several studies, is not innate but can be developed through targeted training, which underlines the importance of incorporating mental skills training into football development programs (Junnarkar et al., 2021; Mcmanama O'Brien et al., 2021). Training resilience in women soccer players involves integrating psychological, social, and practical strategies to enhance their ability to adapt to stress and challenges (Gupta & McCarthy, 2022). Key



approaches include building mental skills like goal setting, self-talk, and emotional regulation to maintain focus and composure, while fostering a supportive environment through team cohesion and a mastery climate that prioritizes learning and effort (Junnarkar et al., 2021). Coping strategies such as mindfulness, reflection, and relaxation techniques help players manage adversity, while involving sports psychologists ensures tailored support and mental toughness development (Mcmanama O'Brien et al., 2021). Leveraging social support from coaches, teammates, and mentors strengthens their network, and maintaining a balance between physical and mental well-being through proper recovery, nutrition, and sleep helps prevent burnout and sustain resilience (Szabadics et al., 2024).

Anxiety management is another essential psychological factor influencing performance. In football, competition-related anxiety can manifest as somatic symptoms (e.g., increased heart rate) or cognitive disruptions (e.g., worry and self-doubt), both of which negatively impact decision-making and focus during matches. Research suggests that anxiety is more prevalent in female athletes, especially in younger players, which can hinder optimal performance unless properly managed (Kristjánsdóttir et al., 2019). For example, the inverted-U hypothesis suggests that performance is optimal at moderate levels of arousal, whereas too much or too little anxiety can lead to a decline in performance context, elite-level players tend to develop more effective anxiety management techniques, such as relaxation, positive self-talk, and focus strategies, which enable them to maintain performance under pressure (Chow & Mercado, 2020; Kerr, 2021). These findings underscore the need for psychological interventions to help young athletes manage anxiety, especially during key competitive moments such as penalty shootouts or championship games (Galán-Arroyo et al., 2024) motivation and Self-Confidence. Self-confidence and motivation are fundamental psychological attributes linked to athletic performance. Players with higher levels of self-confidence are more likely to take risks on the field, make decisive plays, and recover quickly from mistakes (Grønset et al., 2024; Li & Zhao, 2024). A study by (Madsen et al., 2022a) found that confidence levels in women's football players significantly differentiated elite players from lower-level players. Intrinsic motivation—where athletes are driven by internal rewards like personal growth or enjoyment—has been associated with better long-term engagement in sports (Elgaard Jensen et al., 2019). Studies highlight that motivational climate, where athletes are encouraged to focus on personal improvement rather than external outcomes like winning, can enhance intrinsic motivation and self-confidence (Madsen et al., 2022a). When there is an autonomy-supportive environment, where players feel in control of their learning and development, athletes tend to experience higher self-confidence and motivation, leading to improved performance and lower dropout rates (Morales-Sánchez et al., 2022; Pérez Muñoz et al., 2018).

Team cohesion plays a critical role in the performance of football teams, particularly in a sport where success depends on collective effort and coordination. Research on female football teams suggests that higher levels of team cohesion positively correlate with better team performance and greater individual satisfaction (Freire et al., 2022; -López et al., 2022). Effective communication, trust, and mutual support within the team are essential components of cohesion that enhance both the social and task-related dimensions of teamwork. Moreover, a positive team climate, where players feel valued and supported by their peers and coaches, has been linked to reduced anxiety levels and enhanced performance (Morales-Sánchez et al., 2022). The role of coaches is particularly important in this dynamic, as leadership style can either facilitate or hinder team cohesion. Coaches who emphasize collaboration, mutual respect, and shared goals foster a stronger sense of unity among players, which translates into better on-field performance (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2000). Leadership styles in soccer shape team dynamics and performance, with approaches like autocratic leadership for discipline, democratic leadership for collaboration, and transformational leadership to inspire high performance (Gupta & McCarthy, 2022). Transactional leaders focus on goals and rewards, while laissez-faire leaders grant autonomy, and servant leaders prioritize player well-being. Charismatic leaders energize teams through personal vision, but effective leadership often blends these styles based on team needs and situations to maximize success (Ruiz-Barquín et al., 2024).

While this review offers valuable insights into the psychological factors affecting performance in young women's football, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, much of the research relies on self-reported data, which may introduce bias and affect the accuracy of the findings. Additionally, the majority of studies focus on elite-level athletes, limiting the generalizability of the results to lower-level players or those in different developmental stages. Future research should aim to include more diverse samples, including youth and amateur athletes, to better understand the progression of psychological



factors throughout a football career. Longitudinal studies that track athletes over time would also provide more comprehensive insights into the development of psychological skills and their long-term impact on performance.

In addition, more objective measures of performance, such as match analysis and physiological data, should be integrated into future studies to better understand the relationship between psychological attributes and football performance. Finally, there is a need for more research focusing specifically on the unique challenges faced by female athletes, such as gender-based societal pressures, and how these impact psychological factors like confidence and resilience.

The systematic review highlights the practical applications of psychological factors in women's football, emphasizing how integrating mental toughness, anxiety management, motivation, and team cohesion into training programs can enhance performance and long-term development. Coaches are encouraged to foster a positive motivational climate that prioritizes personal growth, resilience, and self-confidence, while implementing mental skills training like goal-setting, self-talk, and emotional regulation. Additionally, promoting team cohesion through effective communication, mutual trust, and leadership styles helps optimize team performance. These findings suggest that incorporating tailored psychological support and training alongside traditional physical and technical preparation is essential for developing well-rounded athletes and achieving sustained success.

Conclusions

This systematic review highlights the significant role that psychological factors play in the performance of young women's football. Key findings include: Mental toughness is strongly linked to high performance, enabling players to cope with pressure, rebound from setbacks, and maintain focus in challenging situations. Anxiety management is critical for optimal performance, with players who develop effective coping strategies performing better under competitive pressure. Self-confidence and intrinsic motivation are essential for sustained engagement and success, with confident athletes more likely to take risks and recover from mistakes. Team cohesion positively impacts both individual and collective success, emphasizing the need for strong communication, trust, and mutual support within teams. Coaching strategies that foster a positive motivational climate and incorporate mental skills training can enhance psychological resilience, motivation, and performance outcomes. These findings underscore the importance of integrating psychological training into development programs for young female footballers, alongside traditional physical and technical preparation.

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