

PSYCHOLOGY OF COMPETITION IN ADOLESCENTS: ANXIETY AND SELF-CONFIDENCE ACCORDING TO TYPE OF SPORT

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Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the psychological differences between adolescents involved in individual sports and those practicing team sports, with a focus on competitive anxiety and self-confidence. The sample consisted of 53 athletes aged between 14 and 17: 22 track and field athletes (10 girls, 12 boys) and 31 handball players (17 girls, 14 boys). The evaluation was conducted using the *CSAI-2 (Competitive State Anxiety Inventory – 2)* questionnaire, which measures three relevant psychological dimensions: cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and self-confidence. The results showed statistically significant differences between the two groups: athletes reported higher levels of cognitive and somatic anxiety, while handball players presented significantly higher levels of self-confidence. ANOVA analyses indicated that the type of sport was the determining factor for these differences, while the gender of the participants and the sport $\times$ gender interaction had no significant effects. The magnitude of effects was very large, confirming the psychological relevance of the findings. These results suggest that the specific nature of the sport disciplines shapes the competitive experience and that psychological interventions should be differentiated: for athletes in individual disciplines, the focus should be on reducing anxiety and enhancing self-efficacy, whereas for athletes in team sports the emphasis should be placed on maintaining and strengthening self-confidence and team cohesion. The study confirms the major role of the sporting context in the development of adolescents' psychological profiles and provides practical directions for sport psychologists and coaches in mental training programs.

Cuvinte-cheie: anxietate competițională, încredere în sine, sport individual, sport colectiv, psihologia adolescenților.

Keywords: competitive anxiety, self-confidence, individual sport, team sport, adolescent psychology.

INTRODUCERE

In sport psychology, understanding the mechanisms through which athletes cope with competitive pressure has become a priority, given the major impact these mechanisms have on performance and personal development. Two of the most studied constructs in this regard are competitive anxiety and self-confidence –

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factors recognized as direct predictors of sports performance (Woodman & Hardy, 2003; Jones, 1995).

The concept of competitive anxiety is described as an emotional response to the perceived demands of a competition, characterized by cognitive worries and physiological reactions. In sport psychology, anxiety is understood not only as an obstacle but also as an ambivalent factor: it can be both debilitating and facilitating in relation to performance, depending on its intensity and on the athlete's interpretation of it (Jones & Hanton, 2001).

Competitive anxiety has important consequences for both performance and psychological well-being. High levels of cognitive and somatic anxiety are often associated with impaired concentration, reduced decision-making efficiency, and physiological overactivation that negatively affect competitive outcomes. At the same time, chronic exposure to competitive stress may lead to emotional exhaustion and decreased motivation, especially among adolescent athletes who are still developing coping resources. Conversely, when anxiety is experienced as facilitative rather than debilitating, it can enhance alertness and performance readiness, depending on the athlete's cognitive appraisal of the situation.

These mechanisms are explained within the Multidimensional Theory of Anxiety (Martens et al., 1990), which proposes that anxiety responses are determined by two key factors: perceived control and situational interpretation. When athletes perceive high control and view competition as a challenge, anxiety may have a motivating role. When they perceive low control and interpret the situation as threatening, anxiety becomes detrimental. In this context, the social environment, especially the presence of teammates and supportive relationships, can function as a protective factor, moderating the negative impact of competitive pressure. This theoretical model provides the conceptual basis for examining how the sport type, individual or team, shapes the emotional experience of competition.

The literature emphasizes the differences between cognitive anxiety and somatic anxiety. The former is associated with mental processes such as worry, lack of concentration, and anticipation of failure (Mellalieu, Hanton & Fletcher, 2006), while the latter involves physiological reactions – from increased heart rate to muscle tension or gastrointestinal discomfort (Craft *et al.*, 2003). Recent meta-analyses show that cognitive anxiety is consistently negatively correlated with performance (Woodman & Hardy, 2001), whereas somatic anxiety may have more variable effects, depending on the level of psychological preparation and the coping strategies employed.

In parallel, self-confidence is considered a central element of athletic success. According to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1997), belief in one's own abilities determines the degree of engagement, perseverance, and stress tolerance. In sport, this construct translates into the athlete's perception that they possess the necessary resources to effectively respond to competition demands (Vealey & Chase, 2008). Numerous studies have shown that athletes with high self-confidence demonstrate

better concentration, superior emotional control, and are less vulnerable to the negative effects of anxiety (Feltz, Short & Sullivan, 2008).

The type of sport practiced is a crucial factor in how athletes experience anxiety and build confidence. Individual sports, by their nature, imply exclusive responsibility for the outcome. This amplifies psychological pressure and increases the likelihood of negative thoughts and bodily tension (Mellalieu, Hanton & O'Brien, 2004). By contrast, team sports, based on mutual support and group cohesion, provide a context in which athletes share responsibility and benefit from emotional support, which reduces anxiety intensity and facilitates confidence building (Carron, Brawley & Widmeyer, 1998; Eys & Kim, 2017).

Comparative studies have shown that athletes in team sports generally report lower levels of anxiety and higher levels of self-confidence than those in individual sports (Hall & Kerr, 1997; Nicholls & Polman, 2007). For instance, Hanton, Thomas, and Maynard (2004) highlighted that team athletes employ more varied and effective coping strategies, especially social support, whereas individual athletes tend to remain anchored in rumination and cognitive self-regulation.

Analyzing psychological differences among athletes becomes even more relevant in the case of adolescents. The 14–17 age range is marked by profound cognitive and emotional transformations, and vulnerability to anxiety is heightened (Compas, Jutte & Bennett., 2017). Adolescent athletes simultaneously face competitive pressures and developmental identity challenges, making them more prone to fluctuations in confidence levels and to the negative impact of anxiety (Gould & Dieffenbach, 2002).

Moreover, studies show that girls often report higher levels of competitive anxiety than boys (Grossbard *et al.*, 2009), but these differences tend to disappear or diminish when contextual variables – such as type of sport – are taken into account (Mellalieu, Hanton & Ollerenshaw, 2009). This suggests that the sporting environment may be a stronger predictor than gender in shaping the competitive psychological profile.

Although there is a consistent body of literature on anxiety and confidence in sport, studies focused on adolescents and on comparisons between individual and team sports remain relatively scarce, especially in the European and Eastern European context. Comparative analyses can provide important insights into how sport type shapes psychological experience and can serve as a foundation for differentiated psychological interventions, adapted both to age and to the specifics of the discipline.

To frame these constructs within a broader theoretical context, the study draws on two established psychological models: the Multidimensional Theory of Anxiety (Martens *et al.*, 1990) and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1997). According to the multidimensional approach, competitive anxiety includes both cognitive and somatic components that are influenced by perceived control,

expectations of success, and situational demands. In parallel, the social cognitive model emphasizes the role of self-efficacy in shaping emotional and behavioral responses under pressure.

From this perspective, differences between athletes practicing individual and team sports can be theoretically explained by the structure of responsibility and feedback within each discipline. In individual sports, athletes bear full responsibility for performance outcomes, which often amplifies cognitive worry and physiological tension. In contrast, team sports are characterized by shared responsibility, group cohesion, and mutual support, factors that enhance confidence and buffer against competitive anxiety.

Therefore, the evaluation conducted in this study was designed to capture how these theoretical mechanisms manifest in adolescents' psychological experience of competition, by assessing the levels of cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and self-confidence through the CSAI-2 instrument. This approach allowed for an integrated interpretation of results, linking empirical findings with the underlying psychological processes that differentiate individual and team sport contexts.

Thus, the present study aims to investigate, in a controlled setting, the differences between adolescents practicing track and field (individual sport) and those engaged in handball (team sport), with regard to competitive anxiety and self-confidence. The ultimate goal is to provide empirical data useful for psychologists, coaches, and specialists in mental preparation, to support the development of personalized intervention programs.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Aim of the Study. The present study aimed to investigate the psychological differences between adolescent athletes practicing an individual sport (track and field) and those engaged in a team sport (handball), with regard to levels of competitive anxiety (cognitive and somatic) and self-confidence. The main objective was to determine the extent to which the type of sport practiced influences these psychological dimensions, with direct implications for mental preparation.

Research Hypotheses

H1: Track and field athletes will show higher levels of cognitive anxiety compared to handball players.

H2: Track and field athletes will report higher levels of somatic anxiety than handball players.

H3: Handball players will demonstrate higher levels of self-confidence compared to track and field athletes.

H4: The differences between groups will remain significant even after controlling for sociodemographic variables (age, gender of athletes).

Participants. The sample consisted of 53 adolescent athletes, aged between 14 and 17 years. The track and field group included 22 participants (10 girls and 12 boys), while the handball group consisted of 31 participants (17 girls and 14 boys). All participants were registered with sports clubs and regularly attended training sessions and competitions specific to their discipline.

The participants were adolescent athletes recruited from accredited sports clubs through direct collaboration with coaches. Selection criteria required a minimum of three years of continuous training and regular participation in official competitions at regional or national level. The sample did not include beginners or recreational athletes to ensure homogeneity of experience and psychological engagement with competition.

The mean age of the participants was 15.6 years. The mean age for track and field athletes was 15.4 years, and for handball players 15.7 years, showing no statistically significant difference between groups. Data were collected during the competitive season, in the pre-competition phase, approximately one week before official events. This moment was selected to capture authentic pre-competitive states when anxiety and confidence are most relevant to performance. The CSAI-2 questionnaire was administered 30–45 minutes before a training session simulating competitive conditions, which allowed the assessment of athletes' immediate emotional reactions.

Instruments. The psychological variables were assessed using the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory – 2 (CSAI-2), a validated and widely used instrument in sport psychology. The Romanian version was culturally adapted for adolescent athletes. The CSAI-2 consists of 20 items, rated on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all true for me) to 4 (very true for me). It measures three subscales:

- Cognitive anxiety (7 items) – reflecting worry, self-doubt, and negative thoughts related to performance.
- Somatic anxiety (7 items) – capturing physiological symptoms of stress such as tension, restlessness, or agitation.
- Self-confidence (6 items) – evaluating the athlete's perception of personal ability and control in competitive situations.

Each subscale generates a distinct score, with higher values indicating stronger presence of the measured dimension. The CSAI-2 has demonstrated good internal consistency and reliability in previous studies with adolescent populations.

Procedure. The questionnaires were administered in a controlled setting, 30–45 minutes before a simulated training session with a competitive character to induce a comparable level of psychological pressure among participants. Instructions were standardized, and participants were asked to respond honestly, based on the state they experienced “at that moment” Confidentiality of responses was ensured, and administration was collective but with individual completion.

To provide a clearer understanding of the research context, additional information regarding participants and the timing of data collection can be specified. The mean age of the athletes was 15.6 years ($SD = 1.1$), with a similar distribution between the two subsamples: 15.4 years for track and field athletes and 15.7 years for handball players. All participants were registered members of performance clubs and had at least three years of continuous training experience in their respective disciplines. Data were collected during the competitive season, in the pre-competition phase, approximately one week before official tournaments. This period was chosen because it typically activates the psychological processes of anticipation, stress, and readiness that the study aimed to measure. The CSAI-2 questionnaire was administered 30–45 minutes before a training session designed to simulate competition, thus ensuring a realistic level of psychological activation. This methodological decision made it possible to capture athletes' authentic emotional states under conditions that closely resembled the actual competitive environment.

Data Analysis. Data were entered and analyzed using the statistical package *SPSS v.26*. The following analyses were conducted:

- Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, coefficient of variation, minimum and maximum values) for each subscale and group.
- Internal consistency (Cronbach's α) for each subscale, to assess the reliability of the instrument.
- Independent samples t-tests (Track and field vs. Handball) to evaluate significant differences between groups.
- Effect size (Cohen's d) and 95% confidence intervals (CI), to estimate the practical importance of the differences.
- 2×2 factorial ANOVA (Sport type × Gender) to test potential interactions between variables.

Ethical Considerations. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided consent to participate. In the case of minors, parental/guardian consent was also obtained. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of psychological research, ensuring confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time.

3. RESULTS

Prior to analysis, assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances were verified. The Shapiro–Wilk test indicated that all distributions were approximately normal ($p > .002$), and Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variances across groups ($p > .002$). Therefore, parametric tests were considered appropriate.

In this section, descriptive data and statistical analyses are presented regarding the differences between track and field athletes and handball players with respect to levels of competitive anxiety and self-confidence, as assessed by the CSAI-2 questionnaire. The analysis addresses both the general tendencies of the groups and internal variations, to highlight how the type of sport practiced (individual vs. team) influences the psychological profile of adolescent athletes.

The results are summarized in Table 1, which presents the means, standard deviations, coefficients of variation, and minimum and maximum values for each subscale, alongside the statistical significance thresholds obtained. These data provide a clear overview of the differences between groups and lay the foundation for subsequent interpretation regarding the impact of the sporting context on the competitive psychological experience.

Table no. 1 highlights clear and consistent differences between track and field athletes and handball players with respect to levels of competitive anxiety and self-confidence.

On the dimension of cognitive anxiety, athletes in individual events (track and field) reported significantly higher levels of concerns and negative thoughts prior to competition. Their mean scores indicate that they are more prone to self-doubt and to anticipatory scenarios with negative potential. By contrast, handball players obtained considerably lower values, suggesting that, benefiting from team support, psychological pressure is more evenly distributed, reducing the individual burden.

Track and field athletes reported significantly higher levels of cognitive anxiety ($M = 21.00$, $SD = 2.33$) than handball players ($M = 13.35$, $SD = 2.12$), $t(51) = 12.41$, $p < .001$, $d = 3.46$. The large effect size indicates that this difference is both statistically and practically meaningful.

With regard to somatic anxiety, track and field athletes more frequently reported physiological reactions associated with competitive stress (muscle tension, bodily restlessness, vegetative responses). The statistically significant difference shows that individual sports predispose athletes to greater bodily sensitivity to stress, probably due to the lack of collective support and the full responsibility placed on performance. Handball players, by the nature of team activity, displayed lower values, suggesting better emotional regulation in the context of competitive preparation.

Athletes in individual disciplines showed higher somatic anxiety scores ($M = 21.18$, $SD = 2.58$) compared to team athletes ($M = 13.77$, $SD = 2.12$), $t(51) = 11.45$, $p < .001$, $d = 3.19$. This suggests stronger physiological activation in individual sports prior to competition.

The self-confidence subscale outlines the most striking difference. Handball players perceive themselves as much more confident in their own resources and their ability to cope with competitive situations. This tendency can be explained both by social support and constant feedback from teammates and the coach, as well as by repeated exposure to situations of cooperation and group adaptation. By

contrast, track and field athletes, facing the event alone, tend to internalize responsibility more strongly and display lower levels of confidence.

The coefficients of variation (*CV%*) confirm these tendencies: the lower variability of handball players' responses on the "confidence" subscale shows a more homogeneous group profile, which may reflect a more stable team climate and a shared psychological culture. Among track and field athletes, greater variability suggests significant individual differences in the way competitive emotions are managed.

Handball players demonstrated significantly higher self-confidence ($M = 17.55$, $SD = 1.98$) than track and field athletes ($M = 12.14$, $SD = 1.93$), $t(51) = -9.90$, $p < .001$, $d = -2.76$. The direction and magnitude of the difference indicate that team participation strongly supports perceptions of control and confidence.

The descriptive data support the hypothesis that individual sports are associated with higher levels of anxiety and lower self-confidence, whereas team sports foster a more positive perception of personal efficacy and lower levels of psychological and physiological tension. These results have important practical implications for sport psychology, suggesting the need for differentiated mental training programs: reducing anxiety and strengthening self-efficacy in athletes, and maintaining and optimizing psychological cohesion in handball players.

Table no. 1

Descriptive statistics for the three CSAI-2 subscales

Subscale	Group	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>CV%</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>p</i>
Cognitive	A	21.00	2.33	11.1%	16	24	.001
	H	13.35	2.12	15.9%	10	18	
Somatic	A	21.18	2.58	12.2%	17	25	.001
	H	13.77	2.12	15.4%	9	18	
Confidence	A	12.14	1.93	15.9%	8	15	.001
	H	17.55	1.98	11.3%	15	21	

Note: A – athletes, H – handball players, Min – minimum value, Max – maximum value, *CV%* – coefficient of variation, *p* – level of statistical significance.

The results from table no. 2 reflect clear psychological distinctions between athletes in individual versus team sports, underscoring how the context of competition shapes emotional responses. Athletes in individual disciplines appear to experience a greater psychological burden, showing heightened vulnerability to anxiety both in cognitive and somatic domains. This suggests a more intense internalization of pressure, likely due to the absence of shared responsibility and peer support inherent in team sports. The elevated anxiety levels could impact performance consistency and mental well-being, making targeted psychological support essential for this group.

In contrast, handball players demonstrate notably higher self-confidence, pointing to the protective psychological benefits of team dynamics. The presence of teammates may serve as a buffer against stressors, fostering a sense of shared efficacy and emotional regulation. These findings underline the critical influence of sport structure on athletes' mental states and highlight the importance of customizing psychological interventions. For individual athletes, emphasis on cognitive restructuring and anxiety management may be beneficial, while in team settings, enhancing cohesion and communication may further strengthen confidence and resilience.

The results show that the type of sport practiced is a determining factor in the psychological experience of competition. Athletes in individual disciplines, lacking the support of a group, display higher levels of both cognitive and somatic anxiety, whereas handball players benefit from a team climate that promotes confidence and reduces the impact of competitive pressure. These differences are not only statistically significant but also psychologically meaningful, with direct implications for mental preparation interventions tailored to the specific demands of each sport type.

Table no. 2

CSAI-2 Subscales in Track and Field Athletes vs. Handball Players

Subscale	Group	<i>X</i> (A)	<i>SD</i> (A)	<i>X</i> (H)	<i>SD</i> (H)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% <i>CI</i>		<i>d</i>
								Lower	Higher	
Cognitive	A vs. H	21.00	2.33	13.35	2.12	12.41	.001	6.39	8.90	3.46
Somatic	A vs. H	21.18	2.58	13.77	2.12	11.45	.001	6.07	8.75	3.19
Confidence	A vs. H	12.14	1.93	17.55	1.98	-9.90	.001	-6.51	-4.32	-2.76

Note: *X* – mean, *SD* – standard deviation, (A) – athletes, (H) – handball players, *t* – independent samples *t*-test, *CI* – confidence interval, *d* – Cohen's *d*

The findings presented in table no. 3 reinforce the central role of sport type in shaping athletes' psychological responses to competition, while largely downplaying the influence of gender. Across all three subscales – cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and self-confidence – the type of sport consistently emerges as the most powerful determinant. Individual sport athletes show significantly greater levels of anxiety and lower self-confidence, while team sport athletes demonstrate a psychological profile that is generally more resilient and balanced.

Gender, on the other hand, exerts minimal influence. Although there is a slight trend toward higher cognitive anxiety in girls, this effect borders on statistical significance and lacks sufficient strength to support firm conclusions. Similarly, gender differences in somatic anxiety and self-confidence are negligible, indicating that the psychological challenges and strengths associated with sport participation are more strongly tied to the context of individual versus collective performance rather than to gender-based differences.

Interestingly, the interactions between sport and gender suggest potential trends - such as more pronounced sport-related anxiety differences among girls or stronger confidence gaps among boys – but these effects remain suggestive rather than conclusive. These nuanced patterns may warrant further exploration but do not detract from the central conclusion: the psychological climate of individual versus team sports plays a decisive role in shaping athletes' experiences of stress and confidence, independent of gender.

These results suggest that the major differences between athletes are not explained by gender, but primarily by the nature of the sport discipline: individual sports appear to amplify psychological pressure and stress reactions, whereas team sports facilitate the development of confidence resources and reduce competitive anxiety.

Table no. 3

The influence of gender and sport on the subscales

Subscale	Effect	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Cognitive	Sport	164.87	.001
	Gender	3.91	.053 (ns)
	Sport × Gender	3.74	.059 (ns)
Somatic	Sport	125.11	.001
	Gender	0.05	.818 (ns)
	Sport × Gender	0.22	.638 (ns)
Confidence	Sport	99.03	.001
	Gender	0.01	.923 (ns)
	Sport × Gender	2.91	.094 (ns)

Note: *F* – ANOVA (analysis of variance), *p* – level of statistical significance, (ns) – not significant

Statistical analyses revealed consistent differences between athletes engaged in individual sports (track and field athletes) and those involved in team sports (handball players). Athletes showed higher levels of both cognitive and somatic anxiety, whereas handball players stood out with a significantly higher level of self-confidence. The effect of sport type was strong and consistent across all three CSAI-2 dimensions, while athletes' gender and the sport × gender interaction had no significant impact.

The two-way ANOVA confirmed a significant main effect of sport type on all three CSAI-2 dimensions: cognitive anxiety, $F(1, 49) = 164.87, p < .001$; somatic anxiety, $F(1, 49) = 125.11, p < .001$; and self-confidence, $F(1, 49) = 99.03, p < .001$. No significant effects were found for gender or for the sport × gender interaction ($p > .05$), indicating that differences in anxiety and confidence were determined primarily by sport type rather than gender.

These results confirm the initial hypotheses and outline a differentiated psychological profile between individual and team sports, suggesting that the nature

of the sport discipline is a major determinant of how adolescent athletes experience competition. This statistical framework provides the basis for theoretical interpretations and discussions on the practical implications for sport psychology, which will be further developed in the following section.

4. DISCUSSIONS

The results obtained in this study confirm the formulated hypotheses and highlight that the type of sport practiced (individual vs. team) has a determining influence on the level of competitive anxiety and self-confidence in adolescent athletes. Athletes reported higher levels of cognitive and somatic anxiety, whereas handball players presented superior values on the self-confidence dimension. These results are consistent with international literature, which has repeatedly shown that individual sports involve greater psychological pressure, while team sports provide social and emotional support, reducing competitive stress. Woodman and Hardy (2001) showed that somatic anxiety tends to increase when athletes lack the support of a team, confirming that the collective dimension can act as a protective factor against the physiological symptomatology associated with stress.

Beyond the descriptive differences observed, these results can be better understood through established psychological frameworks. According to Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997), confidence in one's abilities mediates the relationship between anxiety and performance outcomes. Athletes who perceive higher personal control tend to interpret anxiety symptoms as signals of readiness rather than threat, which explains the higher self-confidence among team athletes. Similarly, Lazarus's stress-appraisal model (1999) posits that the emotional response to competition depends on how athletes evaluate the balance between perceived demands and coping resources. In individual sports, where responsibility for success or failure rests solely on the athlete, this appraisal process generates higher cognitive and somatic anxiety. In contrast, team environments provide social and emotional support that reduce perceived threat and promote adaptive coping.

The absence of significant gender effects reinforces the idea that competitive anxiety and self-confidence are more strongly shaped by sport structure than by biological or social gender differences. This finding suggests that contextual factors, such as role distribution, cooperation, and shared accountability, have a more decisive influence on athletes' psychological experience during competition.

Beyond confirming these empirical differences, it is important to interpret them within a theoretical framework that explains the underlying psychological mechanisms. According to the Multidimensional Theory of Anxiety (Martens et al., 1990), cognitive and somatic anxiety are influenced by the athlete's perception of control over performance outcomes. In individual sports, responsibility is entirely personal, and failure is directly attributed to one's own actions. This increases self-focus, cognitive worry, and physiological tension. By contrast, team sports distribute

responsibility across group members, providing a form of psychological buffering that lowers anxiety and enhances emotional stability.

From the perspective of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1997), these differences can also be interpreted through the concept of self-efficacy. Team athletes benefit from frequent social reinforcement, shared success, and collective feedback, which strengthen perceived competence and self-confidence. Individual athletes, exposed to more isolated performance evaluation, rely primarily on internal regulation mechanisms, making them more vulnerable to performance-related anxiety.

Moreover, the Cognitive-Motivational-Relational Theory of Emotion (Lazarus, 1999) offers a complementary view, suggesting that athletes appraise competitive situations differently depending on the social and motivational context. For team players, the presence of teammates facilitates positive appraisals and emotion regulation, whereas individual athletes tend to interpret similar situations as higher-threat challenges.

These theoretical explanations clarify why individual athletes display elevated levels of cognitive and somatic anxiety, while team athletes report higher self-confidence. The differences observed are not merely statistical but reflect distinct psychological processes shaped by the structure, demands, and social environment of each sport type.

The results regarding self-confidence are also aligned with previous research, suggesting that athletes in team disciplines benefit from constant positive feedback and a sense of belonging, which strengthens their perception of self-efficacy (Jones, Swain & Hardy, 1993). In contrast, athletes in individual sports are more prone to self-doubt and negative experiences, in the absence of an immediate support network. This difference was also observed in Vealey's (2001) research, which showed that athletes' confidence is closely linked to the social context and opportunities for external validation.

Another relevant aspect is the absence of a significant gender effect in the present analysis. Although some studies have suggested that girls report higher levels of competitive anxiety than boys (Cox, Martens & Russell, 2003), our data show that these differences do not reach statistical significance once the type of sport is considered. This may suggest that the specific characteristics of the sport discipline have a stronger impact than gender differences in determining the psychological profile of competition.

From an applied perspective, the results underline the importance of adapting psychological interventions to the type of sport practiced. For athletes, an approach focused on reducing cognitive and somatic anxiety through cognitive restructuring techniques, relaxation training, and coping strategies is necessary. For handball players, emphasis should be placed on maintaining and enhancing self-confidence and on strengthening group cohesion.

This study confirms that the sport environment plays an essential role in shaping the psychological experience of competition, and mental training interventions must be differentiated according to the specific discipline. This is also supported by international literature, which has consistently emphasized the importance of social context and sport type in understanding and managing anxiety and self-confidence in athletes.

Although the study provides relevant results, the relatively small sample size represents a limitation that should be acknowledged. With a total of 53 participants, the statistical analyses offer indicative rather than generalizable conclusions. No formal power analysis was conducted to determine whether the sample size was sufficient for the inferential tests applied. However, the large effect sizes observed across all CSAI-2 dimensions (Cohen's $d > 2.5$) suggest that the differences identified are both statistically and practically meaningful. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples to confirm these findings and enhance the external validity of the results.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The present study highlighted clear and consistent differences between adolescent athletes who practice an individual sport (track and field) and those engaged in a team sport (handball), with respect to competitive anxiety and self-confidence. The results showed that athletes exhibited significantly higher levels of cognitive and somatic anxiety, whereas handball players were characterized by a higher level of self-confidence.

These findings confirm that the nature of the sport discipline is an essential psychological determinant of the competitive experience, influencing the way athletes perceive pressure and mobilize their internal resources. The observed differences underline the importance of considering the specific context when designing mental training programs, so that interventions are adapted to the characteristics of each sport type.

From a psychological perspective, the study provides evidence that collective support and team climate can function as protective factors against competitive anxiety, while individual sports demand additional strategies for emotional self-regulation and the strengthening of self-efficacy.

Overall, the results support the need for differentiated interventions that address both the specificity of the discipline and the individual psychological needs of adolescent athletes. By adapting mental training techniques, sport psychologists and coaches can contribute not only to performance enhancement but also to the development of a more balanced and emotionally healthy sporting experience.

From an applied perspective, several psychological strategies can be derived from these findings. For athletes involved in individual sports, interventions should focus on reducing cognitive and somatic anxiety through relaxation training,

cognitive restructuring, and self-efficacy enhancement exercises. Mental skills such as imagery, positive self-talk, and pre-performance routines can help athletes manage stress and maintain focus. For those in team sports, the emphasis should be placed on group cohesion, communication, and collective confidence-building techniques. Coaches and sport psychologists can integrate these strategies into regular training programs to foster both performance efficiency and emotional resilience in young athletes.

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REZUMAT

Studiul de față a avut ca obiectiv investigarea diferențelor psihologice dintre adolescenții implicați în sporturi individuale și cei care practică sporturi colective, cu accent pe anxietatea competițională și încrederea în sine. Eșantionul a fost format din 53 de sportivi cu vârste între 14 și 17 ani: 22 de atleți (10 fete, 12 băieți) și 31 de handbaliști (17 fete, 14 băieți). Evaluarea a fost realizată prin chestionarul CSAI-2 (Competitive State Anxiety Inventory – 2), care măsoară trei dimensiuni psihologice relevante: anxietatea cognitivă, anxietatea somatică și încrederea în sine. Rezultatele au evidențiat diferențe semnificative statistic între cele două grupuri: atleții au manifestat niveluri mai ridicate de anxietate cognitivă și somatică, în timp ce handbaliștii au prezentat un nivel semnificativ mai mare al încrederii în sine. Analizele ANOVA au arătat că tipul de sport este factorul determinant pentru aceste diferențe, în timp ce genul participanților și interacțiunea sport × gen nu au avut efecte semnificative. Magnitudinea efectelor a fost foarte mare, confirmând relevanța psihologică a rezultatelor. Aceste constatări sugerează că specificul disciplinei sportive modelează experiența competițională și că intervențiile psihologice ar trebui diferențiate: la sportivii din discipline individuale este necesară o focalizare pe reducerea anxietății și creșterea autoeficacității, iar la sportivii din discipline colective, accentul trebuie pus pe menținerea și consolidarea încrederii și a coeziunii de grup. Studiul confirmă rolul major al contextului sportiv în dezvoltarea profilului psihologic al adolescenților și oferă direcții practice pentru psihologii și antrenorii implicați în pregătirea mentală a sportivilor.

