

## Championship Suspensions due to COVID-19 Pandemic: Preliminary Results on Mental Toughness Levels of Greek Athletes.

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### ABSTRACT

Athletes tie their identity to sports competition. Athletic identity loss has been mainly examined in the contexts of injury and/or retirement. The restrictive measures that have taken place during the COVID-19 pandemic have created a unique environment for athletic identity to be investigated in unprecedented numbers. One way to group the measures that have been taken against the COVID-19 is between pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs). During this pandemic, Greece has included the suspension of athletic seasons of most championships in the adopted NPIs. Preliminary evidence has shown that suspending championships during the pandemic has led to changes in athletic role identity and social connectedness, which negatively affected athletes' mental health (MH). MT has been proven efficient against stressors in the sporting environment and positively correlated with MH outcomes.

**PURPOSE:** To investigate if MT scores differ between competing and non-competing Greek athletes.

**METHODS:** This study followed an observational and cross-sectional design. Several professional and semi-professional athletes were contacted via the authors' professional networks. In total, 113 athletes ( $M_{age} = 24.80$ ,  $SD = 6.89$ ) agreed to participate. Both sexes were represented almost evenly in the sample.

The athletes had to first state if they were competing ( $n = 13$ ) or not (even if they would practice with the team/by themselves or not at all;  $n = 100$ ) and then, fill out the Mental Toughness Index (MTI). A two-sample t-test was performed in Microsoft Excel

**RESULTS:** There was a significant difference in the scores of non-competing ( $M = 44.9$ ,  $SD = 6.38$ ) and competing athletes ( $M = 47.85$ ,  $SD = 3.36$ );  $t(25) = -2.61$ ,  $d = 0.58$ ,  $p = 0.0152$ . **CONCLUSION:** This preliminary evidence provides supports for the continuation of data collection. These findings indicate that such shifts in competitive circumstances may have varying effects on athletes' perceptions on MT and, potentially, mental health. Future COVID-19 research should administer the Athletic Identity Measure Survey (AIMS) and a MH inventory, such as the Mental Health Continuum - Short Form (MHC-SF) in order to investigate the relationships between MT and athletic identity and MH, respectively. Future studies should also examine the impact of promoting social connectedness on MT during suspended championships/athletic identity loss.