

Competitive Anxiety in Adolescent Athletes: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Optimal athletic performance is the result of a synergy between physical readiness and psychological resilience, with mental factors contributing up to 80% to an athlete's success. Adolescence is a crucial phase due to the physical and psychological transitions that increase vulnerability to competitive anxiety. This review aims to analyze the dynamics of competitive anxiety in adolescent athletes and identify influencing factors. Using a systematic review method with the PRISMA protocol, 11 selected articles from 2016-2026 were analyzed. The findings indicate that competitive anxiety is a multidimensional phenomenon (cognitive and somatic) triggered by pressured expectations, low self-efficacy, and the structure of competition. Mental toughness was identified as a key protective factor, contributing between 12.2% and 45% to reducing anxiety. Furthermore, dysregulated anxiety was significantly correlated with an increased risk of physical injury. This study concludes that the development of emotional resilience should be structurally integrated into the athlete's curriculum to reduce psychological barriers and prevent performance degradation from an early age.

Keywords: Competitive Anxiety, Physical Readiness, Adolescent, Psychological Resilience

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INTRODUCTION

Optimal sports achievement is currently regarded as the product of synergy among physical readiness, technical mastery, and psychological resilience (Algani dkk., 2018). In the world of professional sports, mental condition frequently serves as the primary determinant, with approximately 80% of an athlete's success attributed to psychological readiness, while physical and technical factors account for only the remaining 20% (Nurcahyadi & Trihandayani, 2024). Sports competition constitutes a high-pressure environment. Athletes are expected to deliver their best or peak performance under the observation of coaches, spectators, opponents, and family. For adolescent athletes, this environment can become considerably more complex. Adolescence is a crucial period characterized by transition, during which individuals undergo physical and psychological changes, form their personal identity, and seek recognition from their social environment. An athlete's primary capacity for managing mental pressure thus becomes the principal determinant in sustaining their athletic career.

Adolescent athletes encounter both physical and psychological demands when confronted with challenges such as anxiety disorders, stress, and fear (Wiyata dkk., 2022). According to Pradnyaswari and Budisetyani (2018), anxiety is one of the psychological symptoms closely associated with negative affect. Anxiety in adolescents may arise during competition, a phenomenon commonly referred to as competitive anxiety. Competitive anxiety can be defined as the tendency to perceive competitive situations as threatening and to respond to such situations with feelings of tension and worry (Brandão & Amaro, 2023).

In the reality of competition, however, athletes are consistently confronted with competitive anxiety. Competitive anxiety refers to the negative emotional reaction that emerges when athletes feel that their self-esteem or performance targets are threatened by the pressures of competition (Listiana dkk., 2024). The phenomenon of competitive anxiety constitutes a condition in which athletes experience cognitive impediments in implementing pre-planned strategies, as well as doubt regarding their own self-efficacy during competition. Conversely, the effective management of competitive anxiety produces a positive impact on performance, as the athlete is operating within a state of psychological stability. Such mental stability enables athletes to effectively actualize their self-confidence, motivation, and concentration in accordance with their established strategies (Herdiansyah dkk., 2022).

Competitive anxiety encompasses feelings of worry, nervousness, and unease, in which competition is perceived as threatening, accompanied by physical symptoms such as increased heart rate and blood pressure, stomach cramps, altered breathing patterns, and facial flushing (Maulana & Khairani, 2017). According to Kaplánová (2024), competitive anxiety constitutes a negative emotional reaction experienced by athletes when they feel their self-esteem is under threat, as competition is perceived as a formidable challenge. This perception can adversely affect performance, given that an athlete's performance in competition is always subject to observation and remembered by others. Competitive anxiety may disrupt athletic performance through the emergence of fear of failure; should an athlete lose a match, a sense of moral burden may follow (Algani dkk., 2018). The state of competitive anxiety — encompassing worry, tension, nervousness, and unease — represents an emotional condition arising from the anticipation of unpredictable future danger or failure (Khoirunnisa dkk., 2025).

Competitive anxiety is a psychological state characterized by worry, tension, and discomfort stemming from the anticipation of failure or unpredictable danger (Billah & Amani, 2024). Physiologically, this phenomenon is accompanied by somatic symptoms such as increased heart rate, stomach cramps, and altered breathing patterns. The consequences of this anxiety include cognitive impairments that disrupt strategic execution, diminished self-confidence, and ultimately, performance degradation. Conversely, mental stability in managing anxiety is critical in enabling athletes to effectively actualize their motivation and concentration throughout the course of competition.

The growth of scholarly literature on competitive anxiety over the past decade has been substantial. Unfortunately, prior findings remain fragmented and dispersed across various sport science disciplines. The need for a comprehensive data synthesis has become increasingly urgent in order to map research trends, identify validated measurement instruments, and consolidate other moderating variables, including influencing factors. In the absence of a systematic review, practitioners in the field of sports psychology will find it increasingly difficult to determine evidence-based strategies relevant to the growing adolescent population.

Previous research has extensively explored the manifestations of anxiety; however, an overlap persists between adolescent and adult athlete populations. For instance, the study conducted by Adefisayo (2024) focused on the relationship between anxiety and performance in general terms, without differentiating athletes by cognitive developmental stage. Torvaldsson et al. (2025), on the other hand, examined the mental health of young athletes from an epidemiological perspective, yet did not explore in depth the situational factors that trigger cognitive anxiety in competitive settings. Although Rice et al. (2016) mapped mental health in elite athletes, a missing link remains regarding contemporary factors influencing somatic anxiety in adolescents (Beenen dkk., 2025). To the extent of the authors' literature review, no systematic review is currently available that specifically integrates cognitive and somatic factors as influences on competitive anxiety in adolescent athletes.

Accordingly, this study addresses that gap by presenting a systematic review focused specifically on identifying the triggers of competitive anxiety — both cognitive and somatic — within the adolescent athlete population, drawing on publications from the past ten years. Unlike other literature reviews analyzed through traditional means, this study adopts the PRISMA protocol to ensure transparency and objectivity. The novelty of this research lies in its integrated analysis of factors influencing competitive anxiety in adolescents — a contemporary

dimension that has received limited attention in previous reviews. This study aims to map and identify the scholarly literature on factors influencing competitive anxiety in adolescent athletes.

METHOD

The method employed in this literature review is a Systematic Review, used to map and identify scholarly literature within the research area under investigation (Salimi & Fauziah, 2023). The framework adopted as the reference for constructing this systematic review is PRISMA for Systematic Review, a method designed to enhance the quality assurance of the structural completeness and process of a systematic review. PRISMA for Systematic Review was selected given that its application in the construction of this systematic review offers a more detailed and rigorous framework.

The literature search utilized four keywords: *kecemasan kompetitif*, *competitive anxiety*, *atlet remaja*, and *teenage athletes*. These search terms were employed to identify articles through the Google Scholar database and the Publish or Perish application. In the subsequent stage, the researchers eliminated articles that met the exclusion criteria and removed duplicates from the total pool of retrieved articles using the Rayyan application. Screening was conducted by reading titles and abstracts, after which the full versions of eligible articles were analyzed.

The initial article search yielded 745 results. Following the screening process, three duplicates were identified and removed, resulting in 58 articles. A further round of screening reduced this to 16 articles; however, only 11 articles met the established inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria defined for this review are as follows: (1) the article addresses competitive anxiety; (2) the subjects featured in the article are athletes; (3) the age of the subjects falls within the adolescent category; (4) the article is published in either English or Indonesian; and (5) the research was conducted between 2016 and 2026.

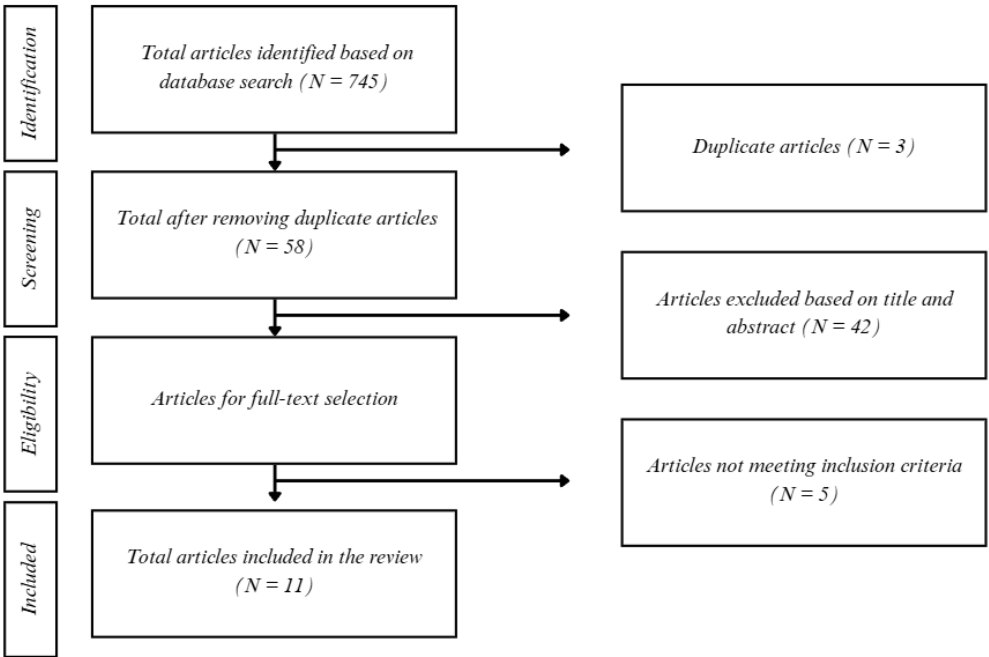


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart for Article Selection

As shown in Figure 1, of the 745 articles initially identified, 58 articles were selected, with three identified as duplicates. Full-text reading was then conducted on the 58 articles, of which 42 were excluded based on their titles and abstracts, ultimately yielding 16 articles. A subsequent screening using the inclusion criteria identified five articles that did not meet the requirements. The final result comprises 11 articles that successfully passed through the screening process. These articles were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. List of Competitive Anxiety Variables

No	Author (Year)	Subjects	Subject Age	Factors
1	(Al Amin & Iswinarti, 2020)	Futsal Athletes	18 – 30 Years	Situational and individual factors
2	(Algani dkk., 2018)	Volleyball Athletes	12 – 22 Years	Internal factors (self-confidence, trait anxiety, positive-negative affect, mental toughness) and external factors (training, skill level, sport type, competitive situation, and competitive experience)
3	(Annisa & Kurniawan, 2022)	Basketball Athletes	21 – 41 Years	Causative factors include competitive conditions or situations, threats to athlete image, uncertainty of outcomes, exposure to public opinion, professional demands such as media pressure, potential for injury, and low mental toughness
4	(Fatimah dkk., 2025)	Pencak Silat Athletes	Pre-adolescent and Adolescent	Factors may be triggered by high training intensity, performance demands, competitive pressure, threats to self-esteem, coach support, competitive experience, prior success, and past injury trauma
5	(Lailiyah & Jannah, 2022)	Pencak Silat Athletes	14 – 21 Years	Internal factors (self-confidence, trait anxiety) and external factors (coach, competitive situation, competitive experience, and direct-contact sport type). Physical unpreparedness and anticipation of demanding tasks may also trigger competitive anxiety
6	(Listiana dkk., 2024)	17 Sport Disciplines	20s	Influenced by negative expectations of success, low emotional control, delegation pressure, supporter expectations, and low mental toughness in facing obstacles
7	(Nandu dkk., 2022)	Track and Field Athletes	16 – 18 Years	Primary factors include competition structure (track athletes experience higher anxiety due to having only one attempt), high spectator attention, and the risk of disqualification due to technical errors such as false starts
8	(Nurcahyadi & Trihandayani, 2024)	Whitewater Rafting Athletes	18 – 25 Years	Factors stem from threats to self-esteem, ambiguity of the competitive situation, lack of self-confidence, and pressure from

				excessively high expectations
9	(Rachudu & Rumini, 2025)	Badminton Athletes	17 Years	Factors include intrinsic factors (fear of failure, lack of competitive experience) and extrinsic factors (opponents, spectators, and court conditions)
10	(Rasyid & Rambey, 2024)	Individual and Team Sport Athletes	17 – 30 Years	Factors may be triggered by environmental demands such as winning targets, low self-efficacy, and doubt and fear of failure
11	(Ratu dkk., 2025)	Karate Athletes	15 - 27 Years	Factors may include formidable obstacles, low self-confidence, opponents with greater experience, and fear of public judgment in the event of failure

Research on psychological dynamics in sport consistently demonstrates that competitive anxiety is a significant challenge manifesting through the cognitive and somatic components of athletes, as well as their level of self-confidence. An analysis of the scholarly literature reveals that competitive anxiety is a multidimensional psychological challenge that consistently affects the mental and physical condition of athletes across various sport disciplines, ranging from volleyball and basketball to pencak silat and whitewater rafting. This phenomenon manifests through cognitive components such as excessive worry and concentration disruption, as well as somatic components in the form of physical tension that can impede athletes' peak performance (Al Amin & Iswinarti, 2020; Algani dkk., 2018; Annisa & Kurniawan, 2022; Nurcahyadi & Trihandayani, 2024).

One of the primary protective factors identified is mental toughness, whereby athletes with higher levels of toughness tend to exhibit lower anxiety due to their capacity to perceive pressure as an adaptive challenge (Algani dkk., 2018; Nurcahyadi & Trihandayani, 2024). Research on Indonesian athletes broadly indicates that mental toughness contributes 12.2% toward reducing competitive anxiety, while among badminton athletes, the combination of mental toughness and anxiety management accounts for up to 34.2% of the variability in their on-court performance (Listiana dkk., 2024; Rachudu & Rumini, 2025).

Beyond mental toughness, the roles of self-confidence and self-efficacy emerge as crucial elements that are inversely related to anxiety levels. Athletes who hold strong conviction in their own abilities have been shown to be more composed and confident in facing opponents (Lailiyah & Jannah, 2022; Ratu dkk., 2025). Notably, despite differences in competition structure, levels of self-efficacy and competitive anxiety show no significant difference between athletes competing individually and those competing as part of a team — indicating that competitive pressure is experienced universally (Rasyid & Rambey, 2024).

Differences, however, are found in the technical characteristics of specific sport disciplines. Track athletes have been reported to exhibit higher cognitive anxiety than field athletes, triggered by the limited number of opportunities inherent in their competition structure (Nandu dkk., 2022). The consequences of poorly managed anxiety extend far beyond performance decline, as they are closely associated with a heightened risk of serious physical injury. Extreme somatic tension and the loss of cognitive focus frequently trigger rigid motor responses and uncontrolled movements, resulting in physical trauma such as sprains (Fatimah dkk., 2025).

A qualitative study conducted by Fatimah et al. (2025) demonstrates that competitive anxiety in pencak silat athletes is a multidimensional phenomenon actualized through two primary components: cognitive and somatic aspects. Cognitive factors were identified through the emergence of negative thoughts, fear of failure, mental disorientation, and concern regarding evaluation by coaches, teammates, and spectators. Somatic aspects, meanwhile, manifested in the

form of physiological responses such as increased heart rate, muscle tension in the shoulders or neck, tremors, and impaired motor coordination that hindered athletes' physical readiness prior to competition.

These findings confirm a significant causal relationship between unregulated anxiety levels and an increased risk of sports injury. Somatic tension and the loss of cognitive focus cause athletes to produce rigid motor responses and engage in uncontrolled movements, ultimately triggering physical trauma such as sprains. Furthermore, anxiety levels were found to vary depending on competitive experience, level of self-confidence, and the quality of social support from the surrounding environment.

According to a quantitative study conducted by Algani et al. (2018), findings indicate a significant negative correlation between mental toughness and competitive anxiety in volleyball athletes, with a correlation coefficient (r) of -0.670 and a significance level of $p < 0.001$. This finding indicates that the greater an athlete's capacity to maintain a positive disposition and manage competitive pressure, the lower the level of anxiety experienced during competition. Statistically, the variable of mental toughness contributes 45% to the fluctuation of competitive anxiety, while the remaining 55% is influenced by other variables outside the scope of this study.

In terms of category distribution, the majority of athletes (51%) demonstrated a moderate level of mental toughness; however, as many as 41% of respondents exhibited high levels of competitive anxiety. This elevated rate of anxiety is closely associated with the demographic characteristics of the subjects, who were predominantly in the adolescent age category (84% aged 12–17 years). At this developmental stage, athletes tend to possess limited experience and skills, rendering them more susceptible to negative thoughts, high stressors, and emotional instability, all of which directly impair their psychological readiness in competitive settings.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive synthesis of factors related to competitive anxiety across various sport disciplines by positioning mental toughness, self-efficacy, and competition characteristics as the main psychological variables that interact with one another. In contrast, previous studies have generally focused only on a single specific sport discipline. This study integrates findings from various sport disciplines, such as futsal, volleyball, basketball, pencak silat, athletics, badminton, as well as team-based and individual sports, to demonstrate that competitive anxiety is a multidimensional phenomenon caused simultaneously by internal and external factors. In addition, this study highlights the relationship between competitive anxiety and the risk of sports injury, which has been relatively rarely discussed in depth in previous research. Therefore, this study offers a comprehensive perspective on the psychological dynamics of athletes and provides new insight into the urgency of psychological regulation in maintaining athletes' performance and safety.

The main findings of this study indicate that competitive anxiety emerges from two aspects, namely cognitive and somatic aspects. The cognitive aspect is marked by the emergence of negative thoughts, fear of failure, self-doubt, and concern regarding public evaluation. Meanwhile, the somatic aspect appears through increased heart rate, muscle tension, tremors, and motor disturbances. This study also found that mental toughness and self-efficacy are negatively related to competitive anxiety. Athletes with high mental toughness tend to be more capable of viewing competitive pressure as an adaptive challenge. Conversely, competitive pressure, expectations of victory, threats, limited experience, and social evaluation are considered dominant factors that trigger competitive anxiety among athletes. Another finding shows that poorly managed competitive anxiety leads to decreased performance and a higher risk of physical injury. This occurs due to less flexible motor responses and loss of focus during competition.

The findings of this study are supported by various international studies that show consistent findings regarding the relationship between psychological factors and competitive anxiety. Martens' research through the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (CSAI-2) reported that competitive anxiety consists of cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and self-confidence, all of which affect athletes' performance (Nissa et al., 2025; Wiyata et al., 2022). Other studies have revealed that elite athletes with high mental toughness are more capable of controlling competitive pressure than athletes with low mental toughness. Li et al. (2025)

emphasized that mental toughness is highly important in strengthening athletes' adaptive capacity toward competitive pressure. On the other hand, [Sánchez-Ruiz et al. \(2025\)](#) explained that uncontrolled anxiety may increase the risk of injury due to disrupted concentration and motor coordination during competition.

The similarity between this study and several previous studies lies in the fact that competitive anxiety is a universal phenomenon experienced by athletes from various sport disciplines and age groups. The consistency of this finding occurs because every athlete essentially faces numerous performance demands, pressure to win, social evaluation, and uncertainty regarding competition outcomes. These demands and challenges trigger certain psychological responses. In addition, the characteristics of competitive sports, which are marked by high pressure, require athletes to have good emotional regulation and self-efficacy so that they can adapt to competition situations.

However, this study also found several differences from previous studies, particularly in the variation of dominant factors that cause anxiety. Athletes in sport disciplines such as pencak silat have a higher potential to experience injury and physical pressure, whereas athletes in non-contact sports such as swimming may experience performance pressure and public evaluation. Meanwhile, adolescent athletes tend to have higher anxiety levels than adult athletes because their competitive experience and emotional maturity are still limited. Differences in research methodology, sport culture, and subject characteristics also influence the variation in research findings.

This study contributes to strengthening the concept that competitive anxiety is not only influenced by individual psychological factors, but also by environmental dynamics, the characteristics of each sport discipline, and social interaction during the competition process. This study expands the discussion of competitive anxiety by focusing on the factors that influence it. In addition, this study provides a theoretical contribution to the development of sport psychology, particularly regarding the importance of mental toughness, self-efficacy, and self-confidence as protective factors in facing competitive pressure. This study also fills a gap in previous research, which has tended to separate psychological aspects from the risk of sports injury, even though both are interrelated.

The practical implications of this study show that coaches and sports organizations need to pay greater attention to athletes' psychological condition before they face competition. Mental training programs, such as mental toughness training, stress management, emotional regulation, and self-efficacy enhancement, need to be systematically integrated into the athlete development process. In addition, social support from coaches, family, and the surrounding environment is highly important in helping athletes reduce psychological pressure during competition. Academically, this study can serve as a basis for developing psychological intervention models in competitive sports, particularly in relation to the management of competitive anxiety and the prevention of sports injuries. From a policy perspective, sports organizations are expected to develop sustainable psychological assistance programs for athletes from an early age. Future researchers are recommended to develop longitudinal and mixed-method designs so that future findings can explain the dynamics of competitive anxiety more comprehensively and deeply, including the influence of cultural factors, gender, and competition level on athletes' psychological conditions. For future research, researchers are advised to conduct longitudinal analyses of the trajectory of athlete anxiety during transitional phases. Such analyses may focus on the process by which dominance shifts between cognitive and somatic anxiety as athletes accumulate age and competitive experience. In addition, future researchers are encouraged to conduct experimental studies comparing the effectiveness of cognitive and somatic interventions on athletes' cognitive components and physical symptoms.

CONCLUSION

Competitive anxiety in adolescent athletes is a multidimensional psychological phenomenon arising from the subjective perception of competitive situations as a threat to their self-esteem. The factors influencing competitive anxiety in adolescent athletes are divided into two components: cognitive and somatic. The cognitive component encompasses excessive

worry, concentration disruption, self-confidence and self-efficacy, mental toughness, the emergence of negative thoughts, fear of failure, mental disorientation, and concern regarding evaluation by coaches, teammates, and spectators. The somatic component, meanwhile, includes physical tension, uncontrolled movement, physical trauma, increased heart rate, muscle tension in the shoulders or neck, tremors, and impaired motor coordination that hinders athletes' physical readiness prior to competition. These various factors have been shown to share a significant negative correlation with anxiety levels, whereby mentally tough athletes are able to perceive pressure as an adaptive challenge. Conversely, poorly managed anxiety during this crucial adolescent phase not only results in performance degradation but also significantly increases the risk of serious physical injury due to rigid motor responses and loss of focus. Accordingly, mental stability achieved through effective emotional regulation is the primary key for athletes to fully actualize their motivation and concentration in the competitive arena.

These findings provide empirical support for the Multidimensional Anxiety Theory, which posits that anxiety cannot be regarded as a singular concept. Cognitive and somatic factors are experienced by athletes through two distinct pathways, each requiring different management strategies. Furthermore, the finding concerning motor disruption and uncontrolled movement as a somatic manifestation points to an impairment in sensorimotor mechanisms resulting from stress, a finding with implications for motor control theory, given that elevated anxiety disrupts the automaticity of learned movement patterns.

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