



Coach-Athlete Intimacy Towards Athlete Psychology: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to map the scope of available evidence, identify key concepts, and existing research gaps related to the influence of coach-athlete intimacy on various dimensions of athlete psychology. This study used a scoping method, so that it could analyze and explore gaps in the existing literature. Literature searches included PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science (WOS), PsycINFO, SPORTDiscus, Garuda. The criteria for articles were in English and Indonesian between 2015 - 2025, discussing the relationship between coaches and athletes and its impact on athlete psychology, publications in peer-reviewed journals. So that 5 articles were found that were worthy of analysis. The results are that coach-athlete intimacy has been shown to reduce anxiety, increase motivation and self-confidence. In addition, coach-athlete intimacy can be a mediator between training performance and other psychological factors. So the quality of the coach-athlete relationship is an important foundation in the sports coaching process. Further research is expected to deepen other methodologies and analyses such as gender, age, type of sport, coach competence, in order to reveal more about athlete psychology from coach-athlete intimacy.

Keyword: *Coach-Athlete Relationship, Sports Psychology, Athlete Mentality, Mental Well-Being*

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INTRODUCTION

Sports psychology is a branch of psychology that specifically studies the application of psychological principles and facts in the context of sports. This field covers various aspects that influence human performance and behavior across all sports domains (Reinebo et al., 2024). In general, psychology in athletes refers to the mental, emotional, and cognitive conditions of an athlete that affect their ability to participate, train, and compete optimally (Antonio, 2023). It also includes psychophysiological responses where somatic responses influence the athlete's cognition, emotions and performance (Davis et al., 2022).

Athlete psychology involves a variety of complex interrelated factors that influence their mental state and performance. First, motivation is an internal or external drive that drives athletes to achieve certain goals, such as achievement motivation or intrinsic motivation to enjoy sports (Imtihansyah et al., 2024 & Wibowo et al., 2024). Second, self-confidence is an

athlete's belief in his own ability to succeed in a task or competition (Utami et al., 2024 & Prabowo et al., 2025). Third, anxiety and stress often arise in competitive situations, which can affect focus, decision making, and physical performance (Saniah et al., 2024; Sridana et al., 2024 & Yusup et al., 2024). Fourth, concentration and focus are crucial so that athletes can maintain attention on the task at hand and ignore distractions (Jun, et al., 2023) & . Fifth, emotional regulation is the athlete's ability to manage feelings such as frustration, anger, or disappointment constructively. Sixth, mental resilience or mental toughness refers to the athlete's capacity to remain strong and determined in the face of adversity, pressure, and failure.

Various factors can influence an athlete's psychology and one factor that has a significant impact is interpersonal relationships, especially with coaches (Fitrianto et al., 2024). The relationship between coach and athlete is at the heart of the sport experience and is often considered a key predictor of athlete success. In this context, coach-athlete intimacy becomes a crucial variable that can influence the psychological state of athletes (Jin et al., 2022). Intimacy in this relationship is not just about physical closeness, but rather more about emotional depth, trust, and mutual understanding that develops over time (Zhao & Jowett, 2023). When intimate relationships are well-established, athletes tend to feel more supported, understood, and emotionally secure. This in turn can impact their motivation, self-confidence, and ability to cope with stress (Simons & Bird, 2023).

Coach-athlete intimacy based on literature review, is influenced by several factors that determine the quality and depth of the relationship. First, coaches who are able to communicate clearly, empathically, and actively listen will build better trust and understanding with athletes (Jowett et al., 2023). Second, social and emotional support from coaches is essential, as athletes need to feel that coaches care about their well-being beyond performance achievement. (Wilczyńska et al., 2022). Third, shared values and goals between coaches and athletes can strengthen bonds and create a sense of unity. (Haugan et al., 2021). Fourth, trust is a core component of intimacy, where athletes believe in the coach's competence and integrity, and feel safe to share thoughts and feelings (Gerber et al., 2024). Fifth, the length of the relationship and the frequency of interactions also play a role in building deeper intimacy over time (Lee et al., 2023).

Although the concept of intimacy in the coach-athlete relationship has been widely discussed in the sport psychology literature, there are still research gaps that need to be explored comprehensively, especially regarding its impact on various aspects of athlete psychology. Previous studies may not have systematically collected and analyzed relevant evidence from various studies. Based on the description above, this study aims to conduct a systematic review,

namely a 'Scoping Review', to identify, analyze, and synthesize the existing literature on "Coach-Athlete Intimacy on Athlete Psychology". The main objectives of this study are to map the scope of available evidence, identify key concepts, and existing research gaps related to the influence of coach-athlete intimacy on various dimensions of athlete psychology.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a scoping review method that aims to map the existing literature on coach-athlete intimacy relationships and their impact on athlete psychology. Scoping review was chosen because it is suitable for answering broad research questions and exploring gaps in the existing literature (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005 & Prabowo et al., 2025ab). This scoping review seeks to answer the primary question: "How do coach-athlete intimacy relationships affect various aspects of athlete psychology?" This research question will guide the literature search and data analysis.

Literature search will be conducted on several electronic databases including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science (WOS), PsycINFO, SPORTDiscus, Garuda. The search strategy will be conducted using various keywords and terms such as: "coach-athlete relationship", "intimacy", "sports psychology", "athlete psychology", "psychological impact". Each electronic database will be searched with a variety of customized search terms. This scoping review protocol was prepared with reference to the PRISMA-ScR (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews) guidelines, which are general standards for reporting systematic reviews (Tricco et al., 2018).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria were articles published in English and Indonesian, studies discussing the relationship between coaches and athletes and its impact on the psychological aspects of athletes, research published in peer-reviewed journals, articles published in the last ten years (2015-2025) to ensure the relevance and novelty of the findings. While exclusion criteria were non-academic articles, such as editorials, book reviews, or news articles, studies that did not provide empirical data or direct analysis of coach-athlete intimacy, articles that were not openly accessible.

Data Analysis and Results Reporting

Data will be analyzed regarding study information (title, author, year), research objectives, research methods, population and sample, research results. Then the data will be

analyzed descriptively, with key findings synthesized to identify common themes, knowledge gaps, and areas for further research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This research analysis uses the modified PRISMA-ScR method to be understandable to the reader. Below is the PRISMA-ScR method used in the study as many as 3 stages of selection (figure 1).

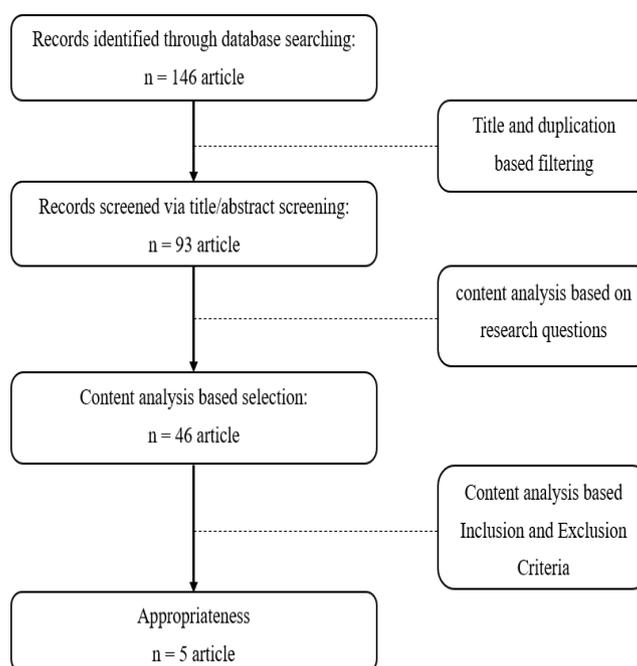


Figure 1. Modification of the selection method using PRISMA-ScR

Based on the results of literature search using keywords in the database, showing 146 articles. Selection based on research title to avoid duplicate research publication, based on the search database, then selected which resulted in 93 articles. The selection was continued by analyzing the research abstract to answer this research question, which resulted in 46 articles. The final selection was analyzing based on inclusion and exclusion criteria which resulted in 5 articles that were eligible for analysis. The analysis of the article will be reported based on the title (author and year), research objectives, research samples, research methods, important findings especially regarding the coach-athlete intimacy variable. The following are the results of the article analysis

Table 1. The findings of the article on coach-athlete intimacy towards psychology in athlete

Title (author and year)	Research purpose	Sample	Research method	Results
Intimasi Pelatih-Athlet dan Kecemasan Bertanding Pada Atlet Bola Voli Putri (Sabilla & Jannah, 2017)	Testing the relationship between competition anxiety and coach-athlete intimacy in female volleyball athletes.	The research subjects or samples were 60 students who were members of the Student Activity Unit (UKM) for women's volleyball at Surabaya State University.	This study uses a quantitative correlational method.	The correlation coefficient value is negative (-0.661). This means that an increase in coach-athlete intimacy will be followed by a decrease in competition anxiety. Athletes who have high intimacy with their coaches will feel less anxious when competing. This is because athletes who have good intimacy with their coaches will consider the coach as a person who can be trusted to tell the anxiety they feel, get social support, and feel comfortable, thus helping to reduce their anxiety levels.
Hubungan Intimasi Pelatih-Athlet Dengan Kecemasan Bertanding Atlet Tinju (Pertiwi & Aulia, 2021)	Testing the relationship between coach-athlete intimacy and competition anxiety in West Sumatra boxing athletes.	A sample of 35 boxing athletes in West Sumatra Province	This research uses a quantitative method with a correlational approach.	The sig. value is $0.001 < 0.05$ and the correlation value is negative (-0.543). This relationship has important implications because it shows that closeness and good relationships between coaches and athletes can act as protective factors against athlete anxiety in the competition arena.
Hubungan Antara Intimasi Pelatih Dengan Atlet Dan Motivasi Berprestasi Terhadap Kecemasan Bertanding Pada Atlet UKM Bola Basket UNNES (Negoro & Sungkowo, 2023)	To test and analyze whether or not there is a relationship, either partially or simultaneously (together), between coach-athlete intimacy and achievement motivation towards competition anxiety in UNNES basketball UKM athletes.	The sample used in this study was 16 male athletes from the Semarang State University (UNNES) basketball UKM.	This study adopts a quantitative method with a correlational approach.	The correlation value shows a negative (-0.621) between coach-athlete intimacy. This means that the higher the coach-athlete intimacy, the lower the athlete's level of competition anxiety. Then, there is a significant relationship simultaneously between coach-athlete intimacy and achievement motivation on UKM basketball athlete competition anxiety.

<p>The impact of service quality, family support, and coach-athlete intimacy on the achievement performance of student-athletes through motivation as a mediator (Mandan et al., 2024)</p>	<p>Measuring and analyzing the impact of service quality, family support, and coach-athlete intimacy on achievement performance of student athletes through motivation as a mediator variable.</p>	<p>The sample of this study consisted of 125 student athletes from Riau Province.</p>	<p>This research is a descriptive correlational study using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach with the help of Smart PLS software.</p>	<p>Coach-athlete intimacy has a significant and positive effect on student athlete motivation ($p = 0.000$). However, Coach-athlete intimacy does NOT have a significant direct effect on athlete achievement performance ($p = 0.532$). Although, Coach-athlete intimacy has a significant effect on athlete achievement performance through motivation as a mediator ($p = 0.012$). Although coach-athlete intimacy does not show a significant direct effect on achievement performance, this study found that coach-athlete intimacy has a crucial role as a motivational driver, and this motivation is what then significantly affects athlete achievement performance.</p>
<p>The influence of performance in training on self-confidence of wheelchair athletes with coach-athlete intimacy as a moderating variable (Latief et al., 2024)</p>	<p>Analyzing performance in training affects wheelchair athletes' self-confidence. Then, measuring how coach-athlete intimacy acts as a moderating variable in the relationship between performance in training and wheelchair athletes' self-confidence.</p>	<p>The sample of this study consisted of 65 disabled wheelchair athletes.</p>	<p>Quantitative research using the Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) approach</p>	<p>Training performance showed a significant effect on athlete self-confidence (sig. 0.003 or $p < 0.05$) and ($R^2 = 12.8\%$). Furthermore, coach-athlete intimacy positively and significantly moderated the relationship between training performance and wheelchair athlete self-confidence (sig. 0.000 or $p < 0.05$) and ($R^2 = 47.2\%$). This study clearly shows that although training performance is important, the role of coach-athlete intimacy is key in maximizing the increase in self-confidence in wheelchair athletes.</p>

Discussion

The results of this scoping review consistently show that intimacy or closeness of the relationship between coach and athlete plays an important role in influencing various aspects of athlete psychology, particularly in terms of anxiety, motivation, self-confidence, and mental well-being.

Three main studies Sabilla & Jannah, (2017); Pertiwi & Aulia, (2021); and Negoro & Sungkowo, (2023) consistently shows that the higher the level of intimacy between the coach and the athlete, the lower the level of competition anxiety felt by the athlete. The significant negative relationship between these two variables indicates that intimacy functions as a form of social emotional support, which allows athletes to feel more comfortable, safe, and have a place to channel psychological stress. This finding is supported by a supporting article from Wilczyńska et al., (2022) & Gerber et al., (2024) which explains that the coach-athlete relationship contributes to reducing symptoms of anxiety and burnout, as well as supporting psychomotor performance and motivation in athletes after undergoing psychological training interventions with coaches.

Research by Mandan et al., (2024) found that although intimacy did not directly affect performance, through increased motivation, the relationship had a strong indirect effect. This means that closeness to the coach can generate a sense of growth and achievement, because the athlete feels supported, appreciated, and emotionally motivated. This is supported by findings from Freire et al., (2023) which emphasizes the importance of coaches in encouraging team cohesion and a supportive environment as the basis for building athlete motivation.

Research by Latief et al., (2024) provides additional insight that a close coach-athlete relationship can moderate the relationship between training performance and self-confidence. Intimacy acts as a psychological reinforcer, such that athletes feel more confident in their abilities when supported by a coach with whom they have an emotional closeness. Findings from Alp et al., (2021) also reinforces this, especially in female athletes, who tend to respond positively to interpersonal closeness with coaches in shaping their sporting self-confidence.

Some supporting articles such as from Pomerleau-Fontaine et al., (2023) and Gerber et al., (2024) emphasizes that healthy interpersonal relationships between coaches and athletes are correlated with increased emotional well-being and reduced psychological exhaustion (burnout). In fact, the quality of this relationship is one of the important indicators in creating a positive training environment, especially in the context of adaptive sports such as wheelchair athletes. The results of the article from Choi et al., (2020) highlighted that effective communication is an important mediator in the coach-athlete relationship and influences the psychological condition of athletes such as burnout. This is in line with the concept of intimacy, which requires open communication, mutual trust, and emotional understanding between coaches and athletes as the foundation of healthy interpersonal relationships.

Coach-athlete intimacy significantly plays a protective and reinforcing role in the psychological well-being of athletes. Intimacy has been shown to reduce anxiety, increase

motivation, strengthen self-confidence, and support overall emotional well-being. The emotional closeness built through open communication, mutual trust, and consistent support from the coach not only provides short-term psychological benefits, but also forms an important foundation for the sustainability of athlete performance and career development in the long term. Therefore, fostering an intimate and supportive relationship between coach and athlete should be an integral part of a coaching approach that focuses on balancing athlete performance and mental health.

This study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the number of studies that specifically examine coach-athlete intimacy towards athlete psychology is still limited and most of them only focus on the aspect of competition anxiety, so they do not represent the entire psychological dimension of athletes. Second, most of the studies used quantitative designs and were cross-sectional, so they could not explain the cause-and-effect relationship in depth or the development of intimacy relationships over time. Finally, there were variations in the definition and measurement of coach-athlete intimacy between studies, which could affect the consistency of the findings in this review. It is hoped that with the results of this study, further studies can deepen the methodology with a mixed approach and other analyses such as gender, age, type of sport, coach competence, in order to reveal more about athlete psychology from coach-athlete intimacy.

CONCLUSION

Intimacy or closeness of the relationship between coach and athlete plays a crucial role in shaping the overall psychological condition of athletes. An intimate relationship between coach and athlete has been consistently proven to reduce anxiety levels, increase motivation, strengthen self-confidence, and support the emotional well-being of athletes. This intimacy functions as a form of social and emotional support that creates a sense of security, comfort, and trust in athletes, which ultimately has an impact on improving performance and mental resilience. In addition, intimacy also acts as a mediator in the relationship between training performance and other psychological factors, indicating that the quality of the interpersonal relationship between coach and athlete is an important foundation in the sports coaching process. Therefore, the formation of a supportive and emotional coach-athlete relationship should be a primary concern in coaching strategies that not only pursue performance, but also pay attention to the mental health and long-term development of athletes. It is hoped that with the results of this study, further studies can deepen the methodology with a mixed approach

and other analyses such as gender, age, type of sport, coach competence, in order to reveal more about athlete psychology from coach-athlete intimacy.

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