

# The Psychological Impact of COVID -19 and Mental Relaxation Practices by Amateur Boxers: A Qualitative Study

Sangeeta Vijayasimha<sup>1\*</sup> and Vijayalaya Srinivas T.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

\*Corresponding Author

Email: sangeeta.vijayasimha@gmail.com

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## ABSTRACT

A COVID-19 outbreak had been spreading in many parts of the world since December 2019. Not only did the pandemic bring with it the chance of infectious mortality, but it has also brought with it a tremendous psychological burden. The study looked at the impact of emotional experiences and mental relaxation practices on amateur boxers in an urban Indian setting. The information was gathered using a semi-structured phone interview utilising a qualitative approach. A total of 25 amateur boxers were recruited from various training centers of boxing in Bengaluru, Karnataka, India. The participants participated in the study to report their emotional experiences and use of mental relaxation practices during the pandemic. Effective practices like pranayama, Yoga, guided meditation and relaxation, Sudarshan Kriya, Progressive Muscle Relaxation and positive affirmations have created an impactful change in emotional well-being and coping abilities. The researcher created five themes using Riessman's Narrative analysis for a narrative approach: Psychological challenges faced during the pandemic, Mental relaxation as a strategy of coping, Psychological adaptation and changing of thinking, Adaptation of lifestyle and training, Positive affirmation and positive reinforcement. The findings showed that practicing mental relaxation techniques improved Mental health, emotional regulation and coping skills throughout the pandemic.

**Keywords:** Amateur boxers, COVID-19 challenges, Mental relaxation techniques, Coping mechanisms

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## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, which appeared at the end of 2019, has caused tremendous impacts on physical and psychological health among people (Vahia et al. 2020). Among the affected persons, the sportspeople, especially amateur boxers, were highly disrupted by restrictions that were brought upon them as a result of the pandemic. Besides common health issues, the pandemic affected training regimes, competitions and performance preparedness in athletes negatively. Lockdowns, training facilities closures, and social distancing are some of the measures that resulted in the disruption of structured practice, decreased access to coaching, and fewer sparring and competition opportunities. These disturbances led to more psychological problems, such as stress, frustration, uncertainty, and lack of motivation (Lind et al., 2020). Moreover, the abrupt shift in the routine and the absence of sport-related activities impacted the emotional state of athletes, which is why it is necessary to know how amateur boxers overcame such obstacles in the course of the pandemic.

Movement restrictions, closure of schools and businesses, postponement of public events, and extra precautions for the elderly were implemented because of concerns that they might be more susceptible to severe cases of COVID-19

due to preexisting conditions and the physiological changes that come with advancing age, as reported by Falvo et al. (2020). Also, the elderly were not allowed in food stores and supermarkets, and special early shopping hours for seniors were instituted at pharmacies and other essential service providers. Cases of similar disturbances in training and performance have been reported amongst athletes during the pandemic. However, these actions were not well communicated or addressed with the general public, and the effects of certain preventive measures on people's health and welfare were widely disregarded. Seniors who already had age-related comorbidities that put them at risk were further separated by rigorous activity restrictions. This seclusion intensified emotions of fear, worry, and loneliness, resulting in a major psychological cost. It is essential to comprehend how these people handled such extraordinary difficulties in order to create focused mental health solutions.

Mental relaxation methods have been generally known to be effective non-pharmacological measures of dealing with psychological stress and enhancing general well-being. Mindfulness-based breathing, compassion-focused meditation, and body scan techniques are some of the techniques that help people manage their emotional states by focusing attention in the present, as well as lessening

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cognitive overload. The practices are especially applicable in high-stress situations because they will help to control emotions, gain a better understanding of oneself, and develop better coping skills. Further, the stress-reducing practices, including walking meditation, mantras, and grounding techniques, are also helpful in stress reduction and maintaining mental stability. The continuous practice of these has been linked to a better level of emotional control and adaptability to stressors (Afonso et al., 2020).

There is evidence to suggest that these interventions can be effective in a wide range of populations, such as healthcare professionals and people who are psychologically distressed (Lomas et al., 2018). Individual and group-based interventions have shown positive results in terms of minimising stress, anxiety, and emotional dysregulation (Krusche et al., 2013; Chadi et al., 2018, 2020; Champion et al., 2018). Moreover, self-affirmation and relaxation methods that are based on subconscious processes have been identified to facilitate coping and resilience in the face of a difficult situation (Steele, 1988).

These strategies are especially applicable to athletes (and amateur boxers in particular) who have seen their training, competition, and performance regimens shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic. These interruptions were a major psychological problem, such as stress, uncertainty, and lack of motivation. Although there is an increasing literature on the psychological effects of COVID-19, scant focus has been on how athletes have applied mental relaxation techniques as a non-pharmacological coping mechanism to these problems.

Thus, the current qualitative research will examine the application of mental relaxation methods by amateur boxers in overcoming their psychological difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic. Knowledge of such coping mechanisms can also be used to create effective interventions that can enhance psychological well-being and performance preparedness in athletic populations during a state of disruption.

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected the psychological health of the population, and athletes are especially challenged to prepare for performances, training, and competition schedules amid gaps in training, competition plans, and rehearsal. Lockdowns, social distancing, and sports facility closures led to reduced physical activity, limited access to coaching, and fewer opportunities for competition, thereby increasing stress, uncertainty, and loss of motivation among sports people. Recent studies note that psychological relaxation methods, including mindfulness, yoga, and breathing-based programs, are essential in dealing with psychological stress and improving emotional regulation. It has also been demonstrated that The practice of mindfulness may improve athletes' ability to regulate emotions, manage stress, and enhance psychological health (Lomas et al., 2018).

Empirical data indicate that the integration of physical activity and mindfulness-based interventions leads to better

mental health and well-being improvements than either of the two (Remskar et al., 2024). Moreover, intervention-based research has shown that mindfulness interventions provided to athletes can greatly decrease the level of anxiety and enhance psychological functioning (Gao et al., 2024). mindfulness-based practices have been linked to better emotional regulation and stress management in athletes (Gao et al., 2024) The results of the research indicate the relevance of mental training in improving psychological and athletic performance. Yoga and mindfulness-based interventions have also been found to be useful as a complementary (non-pharmacological) stress and anxiety reduction strategy among athletes, but the evidence indicates that it leads to a positive change in the mental well-being of these athletes and their professional results (Kanaujia et al., 2022). Also, the implementation of digital and remote mental health interventions has become even faster due to the pandemic.

The studies suggest that mobile-based mindfulness interventions have been proven as effective in anxiety reduction and mental health outcomes in athletes, which may be regarded as the flexibility of practices in crises (Gao et al., 2024). Qualitative research is important in describing lived experiences and coping strategies during such unprecedented events as COVID-19 (Teti et al., 2020). Narrative methods, including the approach by Riessman, can be used to investigate the mechanisms of how people perceive and react to environmental disturbances in detail (Riessman, 1993, 2008). Although the literature on psychological well-being and mindfulness-based interventions is rapidly increasing, there is a lack of research on the topic of amateur athletes, specifically boxers, and their application of mental relaxation techniques as non-pharmacological coping mechanisms in the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the current research will fill this gap by investigating the psychological issues of amateur boxers and how mental relaxation techniques can be effective non-pharmacological coping mechanisms. The knowledge of these mechanisms may help come up with specific interventions that could benefit the psychological well-being and performance preparedness of athletic populations.

## METHODS

The current analysis utilized a qualitative research design where semi-structured telephone interviews were used to investigate the importance of mental relaxation as a non-pharmacological coping method of amateur boxers in the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative method was suitable for acquiring in-depth knowledge of participants lived experiences, emotional reactions, and coping mechanisms when faced with disruption on an unprecedented scale. The information was gathered via semi-structured interviews via telephone, which are carried out according to the COVID-19 safety measures, like social distancing and restrictions on movement.

The methodology helped the researcher to obtain information and also provided the safety of the participants. Qualitative research comes in handy, especially when

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describing complicated psychological experiences and solving how individuals perceive and react to difficult circumstances (Creswell, 2014). The research understands the meaning of the different types of mental relaxation and what it means to each participant, as well as subjective experiences and individual interpretations of mental relaxation practices, so that quantitative methods would not have been sufficient to capture this depth and complexity.

Due to the need to allow participants to voice their emotions, experiences, and struggles in detail, but also to ensure some consistency across the interview's, semi-structured interviews were chosen. This technique also allowed participants to openly share psychological experiences with anxiety, stress, threat, and a fear of a drop in performance, and loss of motivation.

The reasons for using telephone interviews for this project were COVID-19 restrictions, social distancing, and safety concerns. This method not only kept participants safe but also enabled continuous data collection throughout the pandemic. Further, the telephone interviews allowed participants to talk at ease in their familiar surroundings, which could have resulted in greater openness and honesty with their responses.

Narrative analysis using Riessman's principles was found to be appropriate as it sought to understand the meaning-making process of amateur boxers in relation to the pandemic experience. The thematic narrative analysis approach was deemed suitable for this study, as it was intended to gain insight into the meaning amateur boxers created and extracted from their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic as a means of understanding. Narrative analysis is centered on participants' stories and how individuals make meaning of challenging life events. Riessman's framework of emotional experiences, psychological adaptations, and coping through personal narratives was useful in identifying patterns, themes, and psychological meanings in the emotional experiences of the participants.

Purposive sampling was used as it was important to have participants who had firsthand knowledge of the disruption of boxing training, competitions, and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenge of choosing amateur boxers who had appropriate lived experiences assured rich, meaningful and relevant data that was directly related to the study objectives.

The study aimed to investigate how amateur boxers used mental relaxation techniques in dealing with mental issues that had come as a result of the disturbance of training sessions, competitions, and performance preparation at the height of the pandemic.

## **Sample**

The study involved 25 amateur boxers aged 18 years and older, who were chosen through purposive sampling. Researchers used purposive sampling to recruit people based on their direct experiences of training disruption, emotional challenges, and coping adaptations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Objective**

This study aimed to evaluate the psychological issues of amateur boxers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and to discuss the effect of mental relaxation activities as non-pharmacological coping mechanisms in dealing with stress and staying performance-ready.

## **Aim**

This qualitative study aimed to explore the psychological experiences and coping strategies of amateur boxers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Procedure**

The collection of data was carried out through semi-structured telephone interviews that were in-depth and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Open-ended questions were applied to elicit extensive stories about the emotional experiences, disruptions in training and mental relaxation methods that the subjects employed during the pandemic. These were carried out using verbal consent, and the purpose of the research was explained to the interviewers. The anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. Participants gave their consent to record interviews on tape, which were then transcribed word-for-word to be analysed. All participants gave informed consent and the study was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines. Telephone interviews were selected because of the restrictions caused by the pandemic, making it possible to collect data safely and efficiently. This approach constrained the tracking of non-verbal communication; however, it enabled a free flow of information and allowed participants to share their stories in a comfortable setting.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The study employed the narrative analysis approach suggested by Riessman to seek the meaning of the experiences of the participants. It is a way of realising how people create and express their experiences through narratives (Riessman, 1993, 2008).

Since this study aimed to investigate the lived experiences of amateur boxers during COVID-19, narrative analysis was adopted. Since the data was based on personal narratives as told in interviews, this method permitted an in-depth knowledge of how participants made sense of their feelings and responses to them. Its ability to capture meaning, context and psychological adaptation in crises made it especially appropriate for this analysis. Interviews were conducted until the saturation of themes was reached, that is, no new themes emerged significantly.

Riessman's narrative analysis approach was used to analyse the data. Transcripts of the interviews were read several times to become familiar with the data. Preliminary coding was done to isolate significant units in terms of emotional experiences, coping mechanisms and training disruptions. Those codes were combined into larger categories that were then narrowed down to themes in a cyclic process.

The data were revisited after some time to ensure the credibility of the data; themes were sharpened by making comparisons and reflections multiple times to reduce interpretative bias and to increase the depth and rigour in the interpretation of the participants' narratives. This procedure guaranteed the consistency, depth and rigour in

the interpretation of narratives by participants. Reflexive notes were kept by the researcher throughout the analysis process to minimise the interpretation bias and improve the credibility.

**Demographic Characteristics of the participants.**

The sample consisted of 25 amateur boxers who were 18 years or older. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants from boxing training centers and athlete networks in Bengaluru, Karnataka, India. The participants were recruited based on coach referrals and contacts of the athletes to make sure they possessed relevant experience. The inclusion criteria included that the participants should (a) be aged 18 and older, (b) have been an active boxer before the COVID-19 pandemic, and (c) have had their training or competition disrupted by the pandemic-related restrictions. We have excluded the participants who were not training actively prior to the pandemic.

The respondents differed by experience of training, competitive level, and accessibility to training facilities in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were already engaged in boxing before the pandemic, and thus their activities were interrupted by the lack of training sessions, competition calendar, and preparation of performances during the pandemic. These persons ranged in stresses of exposure to mental relaxation techniques, and this gave a wide spectrum of experiences applicable to the research purpose.

**RESULTS**

The current research sought to understand how mental relaxation could be viewed as a non-pharmacological coping goal for amateur boxers during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to examine psychological challenges, coping processes, and performance-related adaptations. The data

analysis was carried out in terms of the narrative analysis method developed by Riessman (Riessman, 1993; 2008), which helps to gain a detailed perception of lived experiences based on the narratives provided by the participants.

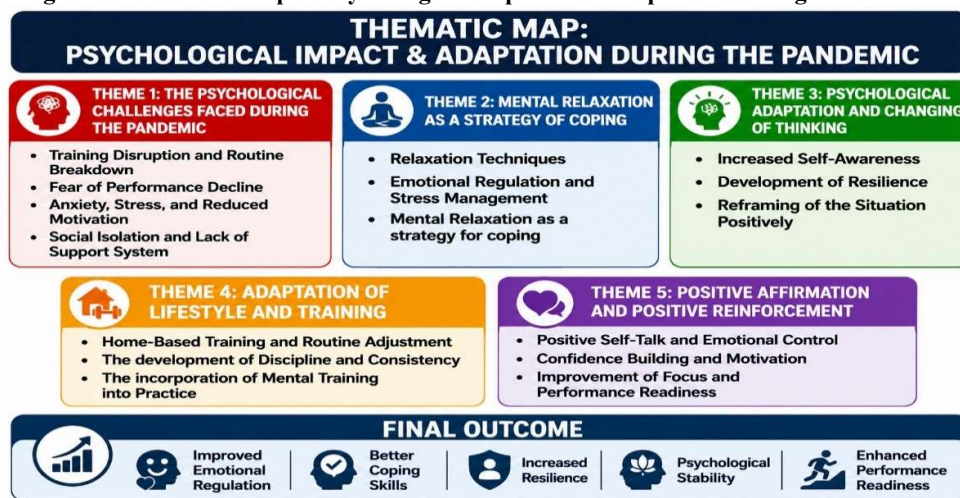
Five main themes and multiple sub-themes were developed through coding, categorization, and comparison of interview transcripts. These themes correspond with the psychological challenges that amateur boxers faced because of the interruptions in their training and competitions, and with emotional regulation and performance preparedness, which was promoted through mental relaxation practices. The results are stated below, and narratives of representative participants.

**Thematic Map**

A thematic map was developed to illustrate the relationships between the identified themes. The map demonstrates how the COVID-19 pandemic led to psychological challenges among amateur boxers, which prompted the use of mental relaxation practices as non-pharmacological coping strategies. Five key themes, along with subthemes, were identified connected to the narrative analysis, revealing the psychological experiences, mechanisms of coping, and adaptive responses of amateur boxers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These coping mechanisms facilitated psychological adaptation, resulting in changes in thinking, lifestyle, and training patterns. Furthermore, the use of positive affirmations and reinforcement contributed to improved emotional regulation, confidence, and performance readiness. The thematic map (Figure 1) provides a visual representation of these themes.

**Figure 1:- Thematic Map of Psychological Impact and Adaptation During the Pandemic**



**Theme 1: The Psychological challenges faced during the pandemic.**

Respondents acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic greatly disrupted their training habits, directly affecting physical training and mental health. They include 1.1

Training Disruption and Routine Breakdown. Training centers were closed, and movement was restricted, which caused the disintegration of institutional training programs. Participants reported that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted their training routines, directly

affecting both physical conditioning and psychological well-being.

#### **Training Disruption and Routine Breakdown**

The closure of training facilities and restrictions on movement led to a breakdown of structured training routines. Participants highlighted that regular practice is essential in boxing for maintaining both skill and mental focus.

“I was worried about losing my fitness because I couldn’t train regularly.” (P1)

“Without proper training, my routine completely broke down.” (P2)

These disruptions led to difficulty in maintaining discipline and consistency, which are critical for performance in combat sports.

#### **Fear of Performance Decline**

Participants expressed concern about losing their competitive edge due to reduced training intensity and lack of sparring opportunities.

“I felt like my performance level was dropping.” (P5)

“I was scared I wouldn’t be in the same form after lockdown.” (P6)

This fear reflects the importance of continuous practice in skill-based sports such as boxing, where performance is closely tied to physical conditioning and mental preparedness.

#### **Anxiety, Stress, and Reduced Motivation**

The participants reported increased psychological distress, including anxiety, uncertainty and lack of motivation.

“There were moments when I was very worried about my future in boxing.” (P9)

“There were days when I had zero motivation.” (P11)

The findings indicate that the participants were very aware of changes in their lifestyle and also training routines to maintain their physical fitness and mental readiness during COVID-19.

#### **Social Isolation and Lack of Support System**

The absence of interaction with coaches and teammates further contributed to emotional challenges.

“I missed my coach and teammates—it affected my mindset.” (P13)

“Training alone was not the same.” (P14)

The lack of a training environment reduced motivation and psychological engagement with the sport.

#### **Theme 2: Mental Relaxation as a strategy of coping**

Mental relaxation practices were revealed as one of the primary coping strategies that contributed to psychological stability and performance-related focus in amateur boxers under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since organised training contexts were disturbed, the participants have become more dependent on self-managed mental mechanisms to cope with stress and continue to experience involvement in the sport. These exercises were used as interventions that were easily available and enabled emotional regulation and cognitive control.

#### **Relaxation Techniques.**

The participants reported practising different mental relaxation techniques, including breathing-based techniques (pranayama and Sudarshan Kriya), mindfulness-based practices (meditation and guided relaxation), cognitive strategies (positive affirmations and visualisation) and body relaxation techniques such as Progressive Muscle Relaxation. Some participants also reported using relaxation techniques, guided relaxation, and positive affirmations to cope with anxiety and emotional balance during the pandemic, which were also described as yoga-based relaxation.

These activities were integrated into everyday life and tended to replace formal psychological preparation that is usually entrenched in formal training setups.

“I began doing pranayama every day to control my anxiety and be more balanced. Muscle Relaxation has also helped me feel much lighter and calmer.” (P16)

“I practice guided meditation and Sudarshan Kriya daily. This has helped me calm my racing thoughts and reduce stress.” (P17)

Importantly, visualisation techniques were found to be particularly relevant to boxing practice. The participants talked of rehearsing movements, strategies and competitive situations in the mind, thus having a psychological attachment to their sport even when they were not exercising.

“I would visualise my training and matches, rehearse the same in my mind, repeat the positive affirmations to play much better.” (P18)

The participants reported that the visualization used as a technique to rehearse mental training as a routine and in situations that are competitive. This has helped them to remain connected to their sports despite the lack of practice, which they do in person.

#### **Emotional Regulation and Stress Management**

Respondents mentioned that the use of mental relaxation practices yielded better emotional regulation and less psychological distress. These methods were useful in controlling anxiety caused by uncertainty, competition, and disruption of routine.

“The pranayama and yoga practices enabled me to cope with stress more effectively.” (P19)

“I practice progressive muscle relaxations, and now I am less stressed and feel more in control of myself.” (P20)

Regular practice of these resulted in greater calmness, clarity of thinking and less emotional responsiveness among the participants. This is consistent with the current evidence that mindfulness-based interventions can improve emotional regulation and reduce anxiety by changing the stress response system (Afonso et al., 2020; Lomas et al., 2018).

Within the setting of boxing, where focusing on emotions and attention are essential to success, such practices helped to keep the psychological state of readiness even when there was no actual competition.

#### **Mental Relaxation as a strategy for coping**

The participants viewed mental relaxation practices as effective self-directed coping strategies that were not based on external or pharmacological assistance. These practices were considered to be sustainable and readily available ways of dealing with psychological stress.

“Yoga pranayama and meditations, it was my form of dealing with pressure in a natural manner.” (P21)

“I was not relying on anything; I just followed meditation and yoga. This was all I needed in my routine; it helped a lot.” (P22).

This impression supports the importance of mental relaxation as intervention, which is especially applicable in the case when the access to professional assistance is insufficient. The effectiveness of such interventions in the promotion of psychological well-being and coping during stressful situations is supported by previous research (Lomas et al., 2018).

### **Theme 3: Psychological Adaptation and Changing of Thinking.**

Mental relaxation practices led to adaptive psychological changes and allowed the participants to better address the difficulties faced during the pandemic. Increased self-awareness, resilience, and cognitive reframing were some of the changes that were manifested.

#### **Increased Self-Awareness**

The respondents indicated increased awareness of their thoughts and feelings and behavioural reactions. This level of self-understanding enabled them to be more aware of stressors and manage their responses.

“After practising meditations, I am more conscious of my thoughts and responses.” (P23)

This type of awareness is an essential element of mindfulness-based practices, and it has also been linked with better emotional regulation and cognitive control (Lomas et al., 2018).

#### **Development of Resilience**

Participants were more psychologically resilient, which is their capability to live with uncertainty and be motivated regardless of disruptions.

“I understood that I was more able to deal with challenging circumstances just because I am much calmer.” (P24)

This indicates that the mental relaxation activities helped to reinforce coping skills, to which the athletes were able to adjust to the problematic situations. It has been shown that resilience is tightly connected with adaptive coping strategies and self-regulation techniques (Teti et al., 2020).

#### **Reframing of the Situation Positively.**

Respondents noted a change of attitude, including the pandemic as an experience that helped them grow personally and develop mentally, instead of just as an inconvenience.

“I began to view this period as an opportunity to be better mentally.” (P25)

This positive reframing is an indicator of adaptation in cognition and would be consistent with the results that

people who practice reflective adaptations tend to use more constructive coping mechanisms (Afonso et al., 2020).

### **Theme 4: Adaptation of Lifestyle and Training.**

The findings indicate that the respondents were very adaptive in addressing variations in their lifestyle and training routines to sustain physical fitness and mental preparedness during COVID-19. The deterioration of opportunities for the composition of training conditions forced athletes to find alternative ways to interact with the discipline, which is a reflection of their ability to adapt to new conditions.

#### **Home-Based Training and Routine Adjustment**

Lack of access to training centers meant that participants would embrace the home-based training and substitute training programs to maintain their physical fitness. Such adaptations involved bodyweight training, shadow boxing and participation in online training.

“I started working out back home so that I could stay fit.” (P1)

These changes make it clear that physical activity remains an essential part of staying physically fit as well as in a healthy psychological state. Mental stability, concentration as well as confidence are greatly associated with regular exercising in activities such as boxing, which require physical performance. It has been found that physical fitness through changes in a disrupted period can go a long way in alleviating stress and boosting emotional stability (Usher et al., 2020).

#### **The development of Discipline and Consistency.**

Without organised coaching and supervision, the participants said they had gained more self-discipline and routine. Because of the burden of training by oneself, a structured set of daily schedules was created.

“I became more disciplined with my routine. Subconsciously, I feel more confident now” (P8)

This change is a testimony to improvement in self-control and individual responsibility, which are critical qualities in sports performance. The emergence of discipline in unregulated settings implies that athletes have evolved by integrating training behaviours, which is in line with studies indicating that self-regulation is a primary element in performance maintenance (Lomas et al., 2018).

#### **The incorporation of mental training into practice**

Respondents said that mental relaxation exercises became part of their daily lives, which means they switched to a more holistic approach to training that involves both physical and psychological aspects.

“Mental training like pranayama and Positive affirmations was included in my everyday practice.” (P12)

Such incorporation points out the increasing acceptance of mental training as an essential element of athletic growth. Mental relaxation techniques such as meditation and visualisation were not only employed as coping strategies but also to boost concentration and be performance-ready. Historical evidence confirms the effective use of such

practices in enhancing the ability to control cognitive functions, achieve emotional balance, and improve performance in athletes (Afonso et al., 2020).

#### **Theme 5: Positive Affirmation and Positive Reinforcement.**

Positive affirmations became an important measure of maintaining motivation, confidence, and emotional stability in the face of the pandemic. Respondents stated that being positive and reinforcing themselves enabled them to manage uncertainty and maintain their psychological involvement in the sport.

#### **Positive Self-Talk and Emotional Control.**

Positive affirmations were employed by the participants to control negative thoughts and to remain emotionally balanced. The practice also helped them overcome stress and avoid being mentally unstable in the face of outside pressures.

“Specifically, I was able to stay psychologically resilient due to positive self-talk.” (P14)

Positive self-talk is a well-known psychological tool for improving emotional control and cutting down cognitive errors. It assists the sportspeople to persevere and be calm, especially under challenging circumstances (Steele, 1988).

#### **Confidence Building and Motivation.**

The use of affirmations was essential in keeping the confidence and motivation levels high, particularly when the players did not train and compete regularly.

“It caused me to stay assured that there was no appropriate training in place.” (P18)

The participants noted that affirmation of positive thoughts reduced self-doubt and ensured that they had a sense of purpose. It is especially critical in sports such as boxing, which closely correlate confidence with performance results. The literature indicates that positive reinforcement and self-affirmation lead to greater motivation and perseverance (Lomas et al., 2018).

#### **Improvement of Focus and Performance Readiness.**

The respondents also said that positive affirmations enhanced their concentration and assisted them in remaining in a state of preparedness to perform in the future.

“It assisted in making me stronger, balanced, and keeping me on my guard.” (P22)

#### **Summary of the findings**

The themes show that amateur boxers not only changed physically but also psychologically by incorporating regimented exercises, cognitive training and positive thinking. The results indicate the relevance of integrating physical and psychological interventions in the management of disruptions and performance preparedness.

#### **DISCUSSION**

The current report examined the psychological issues of amateur boxers in the COVID-19 pandemic and examined

some of the coping methods of these athletes, including mental relaxation practices. The study applied the Riessman method of narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993; 2008) to determine the main themes concerning training disruption, emotional distress, coping strategy, and psychological adjustment.

The results suggest that the pandemic interrupted the training process of athletes, causing a greater number of stress, anxiety, and loss of motivation. This aligns with the past studies that show that abrupt changes in lifestyle and absence of organised activity adversely affect psychological well-being (Usher et al., 2020). In performance-related sports like boxing, intense training and fighting are both important in keeping both physical conditioning and the mental preparation of the sport. These factors were not present, and this was a source of uncertainty and fear of performance decline among participants. According to the results, amateur boxers as athletes who participate in high-intensity and performance-based sports can be highly susceptible to disruptions in the organised training settings. The lack of routine not only has a physical conditioning effect, but also has an influence on psychological stability because boxing is very dependent on discipline, consistency, and coach-athlete interaction.

Practices like pranayama, meditation, visualisation, and positive affirmations that are used in mental relaxation were also found to be effective coping mechanisms. The application of visualisation methods by participants corresponds with current research in sport psychology, which identifies visualisation as a successful approach for improving motor imagery, focus, and preparedness for performance in athletes (Afonso et al., 2020). Without physical training, this type of mental practice might have helped athletes keep a psychological link to their sport. These practices served as interventions that assisted the participants in managing emotions and being focused and resilient. The findings obtained are similar to those of prior research, indicating the efficacy of mindfulness-based practices in anxiety reduction and better emotional regulation (Afonso et al., 2020; Lomas et al., 2018). These findings can also be understood in light of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow, where structured training and focused engagement are essential for optimal performance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The disruption of training routines likely prevented athletes from entering such optimal psychological states, thereby increasing frustration and emotional distress.

A valuable research conclusion in this article is the incorporation of mental training in everyday life. The participants not only managed stress using the practices but also maintained performance readiness using visualisation and cognitive rehearsal. This also conforms to the literature of sport psychology, which emphasises the role of mental training in performance improvement, concentration, and self-regulation.

In addition, the participants showed psychological adaptation in forms of greater self-understanding, resilience, and positive reframing of the situation. These adaptive responses portray how the athletes are capable of

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copied with adversity, and they are also able to stay motivated despite any external factor. Past studies indicate that resilience and adaptation coping style play a key role in dealing with stress in unknown settings (Teti et al., 2020). Another important observation made in the findings is the importance of positive affirmations and self-talk in keeping confidence and motivation. The positive effect of these cognitive strategies on attention and emotional stability supported current evidence that positive self-talk can have positive effects on performance outcomes and psychological well-being (Steele, 1988). Comprehensively, this research paper contributes to the literature on the topic by offering a sport-specific view of the psychological effects of COVID-19 and the efficacy of mental relaxation as a non-pharmacological tool. Although the earlier studies have mostly involved general or clinical populations, the present study has given special attention to the experiences of amateur boxers and how they cope with the disruption involved in this period.

## CONCLUSION

The results of the current study indicate that amateur boxers went through severe psychological problems during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was mainly caused by the interruption of training and competition. Nonetheless, meditations, pranayama, visualisation, guided relaxations and positive affirmation are considered essential mental relaxation techniques that enable control of psychological stress and stay on track with performance.

The practices operated as effective non-pharmacological coping strategies that assisted in the management of emotions, resilience and cognitive adaptation. The incorporation of mental training into the routine activities points out the necessity of a holistic approach to care related to

the development of athletics, based on both physical and psychological aspects. This paper has highlighted the necessity to include mental relaxation programs in sport training schemes, especially in times of uncertainty and disturbance. The findings offer preliminary qualitative evidence that mental relaxation practices enhance emotional regulation, resilience, and psychological flexibility in amateur boxers during disruptive periods.

## LIMITATIONS

The study has various limitations. To begin with, the study had a small sample size of amateur boxers that constituted a qualitative research design, which restricts the extrapolation of the results. Although qualitative research offers detailed information, the findings might not be applicable to the entire body of athletes or sports scenarios. Second, the recruitment was made by self-reported stories, which can be vulnerable to recall bias or subjectivity. The responses might have been biased by personal perceptions and experiences of the participants.

Third, the researchers examined a particular group of amateur boxers in a narrow geographical locality, which might not reflect differences between regions, levels of competition, or professional athletes. Also, the research

lacked a comparative study with other coping strategies or psychological interventions, which would have given a wider perspective of effectiveness

## FUTURE RESEARCH

The future research must expand the study by using larger and more diverse samples in various sports, competition levels, and geographical areas in order to make the study more generalizable. It is advisable that longitudinal studies be conducted to find out the long-term effects of mental relaxation practice on psychological well-being and athletic performance. This would give more insight into how these coping mechanisms change as time passes.

The efficacy of various non-pharmacological measures, including mindfulness, cognitive-behavioural, and imagery training, can also be explored in further research by experimental design or randomised controlled trial (RCT) methods. According to past studies, intervention programs may greatly enhance the psychological outcomes and performance of athletes in a structured program (Lomas et al., 2018). Also, comparative research studies on the issue of mental relaxation by various sports disciplines would assist in determining the specific needs and interventions that are sport-specific. The research could also explore the introduction of digital and online mental health interventions in the future, which received increased attention in the COVID-19 pandemic and have demonstrated potential to enhance accessibility and engagement (Teti et al., 2020).

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