



Psychological Anxiety Levels In U-12 Female Football Players At The MilkLife Football Challenge Event In Semarang

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ABSTRACT

Girls' youth football has seen significant development, but psychological preparedness, particularly competitive anxiety, remains a challenge in developing young athletes. This study aims to analyze the psychological anxiety levels of U-12 girls' football players at the MilkLife Football Challenge in Semarang. The study employed a quantitative descriptive design with a survey method. The sample consisted of 50 female athletes selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using the Sport Anxiety Scale-2 (SAS-2), which measures three dimensions: somatic anxiety, worry (cognitive anxiety), and concentration disturbance. The instrument met validity and reliability requirements and used a four-point Likert scale. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, including calculating means, percentages, and classifying scores based on predetermined intervals. The results showed that the average overall anxiety score was 46 (high category). The worry dimension was the most dominant dimension, followed by somatic anxiety, which was also in the high category, and concentration disturbance in the moderate category. The distribution of categories showed that 54% of athletes had high anxiety levels, 44% had moderate anxiety levels, and 2% had low anxiety levels. These findings indicate that competitive anxiety in young female football athletes is more influenced by cognitive factors that have the potential to influence mental readiness and physical responses during competition.

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A. Conception and design of the study;
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INTRODUCTION

Football is the most popular sport in Indonesia and is played by two teams of 11 players each, with the goal of scoring as many goals as possible (Eka & Marzuki, 2020). Over the past decade, the development of women's football has experienced significant acceleration globally, both in terms of participation, policy support, and professionalization of competitions (Mota et al., 2021). In Indonesia, the momentum of this revival began to be seen with the implementation of Liga 1 Putri in 2019 (Batu, 2020), although it still faces structural challenges such as limited facilities, a lack of specialist female coaches, and a lack of integrated early childhood development (Yunisal, 2025).

One early childhood development initiative is the MilkLife Football Challenge, organized by the Djarum Foundation Bakti Sports in Semarang (Gregorius, 2023). This event is intended for U-10 and U-12 female players from elementary schools and Islamic



elementary schools (madrasah ibtidaiyah). It features an 8 vs. 8 format and various skill challenges such as dribbling, passing control, penalty shootouts, and one-on-ones (Aloysius Gonsaga AE, 2023; Galih Manunggal, 2023). Pedagogically, this event serves as the first competitive laboratory for many young female athletes. However, competition during the developmental years of 10–12 is a psychologically sensitive phase, where emotional regulation and anxiety control are not yet fully developed (Thomas & Cassady, 2021).

In the context of sports psychology, competitive anxiety is a dominant factor influencing performance (Barros et al., 2022). Anxiety is defined as a negative emotional state characterized by feelings of worry, fear, and tension (Kemarat et al., 2022; Ilham, 2021). In team sports like football, anxiety can reduce concentration, increase technical errors, and impair motor coordination (Irawan et al., 2019; Kusuma et al., 2024). Empirical observations at the MilkLife Football Challenge showed that some players appeared anxious before matches, making basic errors such as miscontrol of the ball and poor passing accuracy, and exhibiting decreased performance during the match.

Theoretically, anxiety in sports is divided into trait anxiety and state anxiety (Li & Jiang, 2022; Kikkawa et al., 2023). Trait anxiety is relatively stable, while state anxiety is situational and fluctuates before competition (Thomas & Cassady, 2021). Furthermore, anxiety is also classified into cognitive anxiety (mental worry, fear of failure) and somatic anxiety (physiological symptoms such as increased heart rate and muscle tension) (Gabrys & Wontorczyk, 2023; Ong & Chua, 2021). In young athletes, the combination of the two can impair decision-making and technical accuracy (Dongoran et al., 2021). The main problem with this research lies in the lack of comprehensive mapping of anxiety levels in U-12 girls' football players in the context of school-based regional competitions like the MilkLife Football Challenge in Semarang. Yet, the early childhood phase is the foundation for developing a long-term competitive mentality.

Research on anxiety in sports has grown rapidly in the past 10 years, particularly in adolescent and elite athletes (Barros et al., 2022; Li & Jiang, 2022). A study of Papuan National Sports Week (PON) martial arts athletes showed that anxiety can disrupt attention and reduce performance stability (Dongoran et al., 2021). Research on U-17 youth football players also found that negative interpretations of match situations were significantly associated with increased anxiety and decreased performance effectiveness (Ramadhan & Syafii, 2022). In the context of men's football, Lukman et al. (2024) reported that match anxiety increases muscle tension and reduces movement flexibility. Other research shows that cognitive anxiety is negatively correlated with technical accuracy and decision-making (Gabrys & Wontorczyk, 2023). Physiologically, somatic anxiety increases sympathetic activation, which impacts muscle rigidity (Ong & Chua, 2021).

Gender studies in sports psychology show that girls tend to have higher levels of anxiety than boys, especially during developmental stages (Nurdiansyah & Jannah, 2021). Social factors, environmental expectations, and self-confidence are important determinants (Myers, 1983 in Nurdiansyah & Jannah, 2021). Global research on early-age girls' football emphasizes the importance of psychological interventions based on emotion regulation and mental skills training (Mota et al., 2021).

However, most studies still focus on adolescent or adult athletes, as well as individual sports. Empirical studies on elementary school-aged female football players in Indonesia are relatively limited. The national literature indexed by SINTA also shows a predominance of research on male athletes or without gender differentiation (Irawan et al., 2019; Kusuma et al., 2024). Thus, although the concept of competitive anxiety is well-established theoretically, its application to the context of U-12 girls' football in regional competitive events remains minimally explored empirically.

There are three main gaps in the literature. First, the population gap: most research on sports anxiety focuses on adolescent athletes (U-17 and above) or elite athletes, while the 10-12 age group is rarely specifically studied, especially in the context of girls' football. Second, the gender-specific gap: many studies use a general approach without gender-based analysis, even though psychological differences between male and female athletes have been shown to be significant (Nurdiansyah & Jannah, 2021; Mota et al., 2021). Third, the local context gap: no published research has specifically examined anxiety at the MilkLife Football Challenge in Semarang, even though this event serves as a model for early childhood development in girls' football in Indonesia.

Furthermore, integrating analysis of the cognitive and somatic dimensions of anxiety within the context of elementary school competitions has been limited in national research. Some studies only measure anxiety in general without distinguishing its dimensional characteristics (Lukman et al., 2024). This situation indicates the need for more focused, contextual, and gender-based research at the early childhood level to produce recommendations for targeted psychological interventions.

This study aims to analyze anxiety levels (trait, state, cognitive, and somatic) in U-12 female football players participating in the MilkLife Football Challenge in Semarang. Specifically, this study aims to: Identify the categories of players' competitive anxiety levels. Analyze the dominant dimensions of anxiety (cognitive vs. somatic). Provide an empirical basis for formulating age- and gender-based psychological interventions. The novelty of this study lies in: A gender-specific focus on U-12 female football players. The context of elementary school-based regional competitions, which has never been systematically studied. A multidimensional approach to anxiety that integrates trait-state and cognitive-somatic anxiety into a single analytical design.

Practical contributions for coaches and event organizers in developing early childhood mental training programs. Theoretically, this research enriches the literature on sports psychology in Indonesia, particularly on the development of early-age girls' football. Practically, the research findings are expected to serve as a reference in the development of a competition-based psychological intervention module for elementary schools to minimize the negative impact of anxiety on the technical and tactical performance of young athletes. Thus, this research not only fills a gap in the literature but also strengthens the foundation of mental development in the development of Indonesian girls' football at the grassroots level.

METHODS

Research Type

This study used a descriptive quantitative approach, aiming to provide an empirical overview of the levels of competitive anxiety in U-12 female football players during the MilkLife Football Challenge in Semarang. The descriptive approach was chosen because it is effective in objectively mapping the psychological state of subjects through standardized measurements without variable manipulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2022). In the context of sports psychology, this design is commonly used to identify anxiety profiles before administering mental training interventions (Barros et al., 2022; Li & Jiang, 2022).

Population and Sample

The study population consisted of all female football players who participated in the U-12 MilkLife Football Challenge in Semarang during the study year. The sample, consisting of 50 athletes, was selected using a purposive sampling technique, with the following criteria: (1) aged 10–12 years, (2) officially registered as competition participants, and (3) participating in at least one match. The purposive technique was used because the study targeted a specific age group and competition context (Etikan & Bala, 2017). A sample size of 50 athletes was deemed adequate for descriptive psychological analysis in a homogeneous early-age population (Putra et al., 2021). Previous research has shown that a sample size of 40–60 athletes is sufficiently representative for psychometric scale-based studies of competitive anxiety (Zhang et al., 2023; Lukman et al., 2024).

Research Instrument

The instrument used was the Sport Anxiety Scale-2 (SAS-2), developed by Smith and validated in various sporting contexts (Madrigal et al., 2018). The SAS-2 consists of 15 statements divided into three dimensions: Somatic Anxiety (physiological symptoms), Worry (Cognitive Anxiety), Concentration Disruption.

The instrument uses a 4-point Likert scale: 1 = Never (TP), 2 = Rarely (JR), 3 = Often (SR), 4 = Always (SL) (Mawardi, 2019). This instrument was chosen because it has high validity and reliability in the adolescent athlete population (Putra et al., 2021), and is more concise and practical than the original version, making it suitable for children aged 10–12 years (Zhang et al., 2023).

Table 1.
Dimensions and Number of Items of the SAS-2

Dimensi	Jumlah Item	Rentang Skor
Somatic Anxiety	5	5–20
Worry (Cognitive Anxiety)	5	5–20
Concentration Disruption	5	5–20
Total Skor	15	15–60

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted before the match (pre-match setting) at the assembly point to capture actual state anxiety (Thomas & Cassady, 2021). Athletes

completed the questionnaire independently, accompanied by researchers and coaches to ensure understanding of the instructions.

Data processing steps included: Calculating the frequency of responses to each item. Calculating percentages:

Calculating percentage:

$$P = \frac{f}{N} \times 100\%$$

Calculating the mean score:

$$M = \frac{\sum skor}{N}$$

Calculating the maximum score:

$$\text{Maximum Score} = \text{Number of Items} \times \text{Highest Score}$$

Calculating achievement scores:

$$\text{Score Achievement} = \frac{\text{Score Obtained}}{\text{Maximum Score}} \times 100\%$$

This approach aligns with descriptive analysis procedures in sports psychology research (Madrigal et al., 2018; Putri & Kusuma, 2023).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies, percentages, means, and anxiety level classifications. Total SAS-2 scores ranged from 15 to 60.

Table 2.

SAS-2 Anxiety Level Classification

Score Range	Category	Interpretation
15-30	Height	Athletes are able to manage competitive pressure well
31-45	High	Anxiety is normal but has the potential to impair performance
46-60	Moderate	Significant pressure that can interfere with focus and physical response

This classification facilitates the structured identification of athletes' psychological states (Putra et al., 2021). Analysis was also conducted on each dimension to determine the dominance of cognitive or somatic anxiety, as recommended in modern sports psychology studies (Gabrys & Wontorczyk, 2023; Ong & Chua, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Based on data obtained from questionnaires completed by 50 respondents. The data was then processed using Microsoft Excel 2021. The instrument used was the Sport Anxiety Scale-2 (SAS-2), which measures three main aspects: somatic anxiety (physical), worry (cognitive), and concentration impairment.

Table 1.

Average score of anxiety

Anxiety Aspect	Mean	Category
Somatic	15.2	Height
Worry	16.84	High
Concentration problems	13.96	Moderate

Based on Table 1, it was found that the somatic (physical) aspect had an average of 15.72 (high category). Meanwhile, worry had the highest average score of 17.14 (high category), and the concentration disorder aspect had the lowest average score of 13 (medium category). This data indicates that although their bodies felt tense, disturbances in their thought patterns (worry) were far more dominant in the athletes' mental condition.

Table 2.
Interval scale and anxiety level classification

Category	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage
High	46-60	25	50%
Medium	31-45	24	48%
Low	15-30	1	2%
Total		50	100%

Table 2 shows the cumulative distribution of respondents' anxiety levels. The analysis results show that 54% of athletes (27 people) have anxiety levels in the High category, and 44% (22 people) are in the Medium category. Only 2% (1 person) of respondents fall into the Low category. These results illustrate that almost the entire population of athletes in this study experience high levels of competitive anxiety. The following are the results of anxiety levels during competition in female soccer athletes, with a total score of 2301 out of a maximum score of 3000. Although there were athletes in the Medium category (44%), the majority (54%) were in the High category, and the overall average score was 46 (High category)

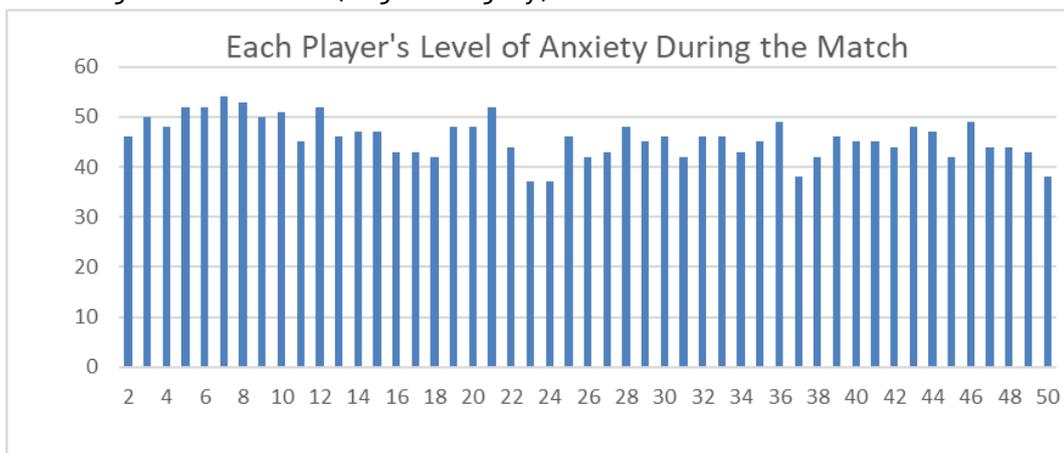


Figure 1.
Graphic Diagram of Anxiety Levels

The diagram above shows that 50 respondents had the highest score of 56 and the lowest score of 27. From the descriptive statistical data table, the mean obtained from the anxiety level measurement was 46 out of a maximum total score of 60. Based on the test results, it can be said that the respondents' anxiety level in competition falls into the "High" category. However, not every athlete experiences the same level of anxiety; rather, it depends on the situation and conditions at the time of the competition, such as individual mental preparedness, pressure from the audience, or the strength of the opponents faced in the competition.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that, in general, U-12 female football players participating in the MilkLife Football Challenge in Semarang have relatively high levels of competitive anxiety, with an average group score of 46 out of a maximum range of 60. The distribution of categories shows that 54% of athletes fall into the high category and 44% fall into the moderate category, while only 2% fall into the low category. The score of 2,289 out of a maximum total of 3,000 further confirms that the match situation exerts significant emotional pressure. These findings demonstrate that competitive anxiety is not simply an individual phenomenon, but rather a collective psychological state experienced by the majority of young athletes in the context of formal competition.

Conceptually, these results align with the multidimensional theory of anxiety, which states that sporting competition triggers simultaneous cognitive and somatic responses (Barros et al., 2022; Li & Jiang, 2022). In athletes aged 10–12, the development of emotional regulation is still in a transitional phase, so competitive pressure is more easily interpreted as a threat than a challenge (Thomas & Cassady, 2021; Kikkawa et al., 2023). Research on adolescent football athletes shows that the first competition or a competition with a large atmosphere often results in a significant increase in anxiety scores (Lukman et al., 2024; Ramadhan & Syafii, 2022). Thus, the findings of this study reinforce previous literature that anxiety is a common psychological response, but can become maladaptive when its intensity is high.

Viewed by aspect, the worry (cognitive) dimension was the most dominant component, with an average score of 17.14 (high category). The dominance of the cognitive aspect indicates that the primary source of anxiety stems from negative thoughts such as fear of making mistakes, worrying about losing, or disappointing coaches and parents. This is consistent with the conceptual structure of the Sport Anxiety Scale-2 (Madrigal et al., 2018), which positions worry as a significant predictor of decreased performance. Recent empirical studies have shown that cognitive anxiety has a significant negative correlation with self-confidence and decision-making in team games (Gabrys & Wontorczyk, 2023; Putri & Kusuma, 2023).

At an early age, metacognitive abilities to regulate negative thoughts are not fully developed (Zhang et al., 2023). Therefore, when matches take place in a competitive atmosphere with spectators and the pressure of scoring, athletes are more susceptible to overthinking. A study by Mota et al. (2021) on youth girls' football showed that social expectations and gender stereotypes can also increase psychological stress. A national study by Kusuma et al. (2024) confirmed that fear of failure and perceptions of being judged by others are key triggers of anxiety in elementary school athletes.

The predominance of worry in this study indicates that psychological interventions need to focus on strengthening cognitive restructuring and increasing self-confidence. Techniques such as positive self-talk, imagery, and goal setting have been shown to be effective in reducing cognitive anxiety in adolescent athletes (Barros et al., 2022; Li & Jiang, 2022). If left unmanaged, high levels of worry can lead to a decline in consistent technical performance, particularly in quick decision-making skills such as passing and dribbling.

In addition to cognitive aspects, the somatic anxiety dimension was also high (mean 15.74). Physical symptoms such as muscle tension, heart palpitations, and body stiffness are natural responses of the sympathetic nervous system to competitive pressure (Ong & Chua, 2021). Within moderate limits, this response can actually increase preparedness (optimal arousal), as explained in the Yerkes-Dodson theory (Kemarlat et al., 2022). However, when excessively intense, motor coordination and technical accuracy can be impaired (Dongoran et al., 2021).

Research on adolescent football athletes shows that high levels of somatic anxiety are associated with movement rigidity and decreased muscle flexibility (Lukman et al., 2024). In young athletes, muscle tension can affect ball control and postural stability. Therefore, integrating progressive relaxation exercises and breathing techniques into training programs is crucial (Putra et al., 2021). Mindfulness-based interventions have also been shown to be effective in reducing somatic symptoms in young athletes (Gabrys & Wontorczyk, 2023).

Meanwhile, concentration impairment was in the moderate category (mean 13). This finding suggests that despite the pressure, athletes were still able to maintain relatively good focus. This is a positive indicator that some athletes possess sufficient psychological adaptive capacity. A study by Thomas & Cassady (2021) confirmed that the ability to maintain attention under pressure is an early indicator of psychological resilience.

However, the balance between these three aspects remains crucial. High levels of worry and somatic anxiety have the potential to disrupt consistent focus when pressure increases. Longitudinal research shows that anxiety that is not managed from an early age can develop into maladaptive patterns in adolescence (Kikkawa et al., 2023; Li & Jiang, 2022). Therefore, mental health development needs to be carried out systematically and continuously.

This finding is also inseparable from situational factors. The MilkLife Football Challenge is a competitive event that features an official match atmosphere, spectator support, and school expectations. Athletes with limited competitive experience tend to be more susceptible to high levels of anxiety (Ramadhan & Syafii, 2022). A national study by Irawan et al. (2019) showed that competition experience is negatively correlated with anxiety levels. This means that the more frequently athletes are exposed to competitive situations, the more adaptive their psychological responses.

Social factors also play a significant role. Support from coaches, teammates, and family can be a protective factor in reducing anxiety (Putri & Kusuma, 2023; Mota et al., 2021). Empirical studies have shown that high perceptions of social support are associated with increased self-efficacy and decreased anxiety (Barros et al., 2022). Therefore, early childhood development needs to involve an ecosystem approach, not just individual training.

The practical implications of this research are clear: training programs should not focus solely on physical and technical aspects. Coaches need to integrate mental skills training into the coaching curriculum. Relaxation techniques, breathing control, imagery,

and match simulations have been shown to be effective in helping athletes manage stress (Zhang et al., 2023; Ong & Chua, 2021). Furthermore, a learning approach that emphasizes a mastery climate over an outcome climate can reduce performance pressure (Kusuma et al., 2024).

Theoretically, this research strengthens the multidimensional model of anxiety in the context of early childhood girls' football. Empirically, the results provide a basis for developing psychological intervention modules based on the athletes' real needs. Further research could explore the relationship between anxiety levels and actual technical performance on the field, or test the effectiveness of mental training interventions in reducing SAS-2 scores.

With a balanced approach between physical and psychological aspects, early childhood girls' football development in Indonesia can develop more comprehensively and sustainably. Anxiety should not be eliminated completely, but rather managed to become a positive energy that drives optimal performance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of a study of 50 U-12 female football players at the MilkLife Football Challenge in Semarang, it can be concluded that the athletes' overall competitive anxiety level was in the high category, with an average total score of 46 out of a maximum range of 60. The distribution of categories showed that 54% of athletes were in the high category, 44% in the moderate category, and only 2% in the low category, with a cumulative score of 2,289 out of a maximum total of 3,000.

In terms of aspects, the worry (cognitive) dimension was the most dominant factor, with an average score of 17.14 (high category), reflecting fear of failure, anxiety about making mistakes, and pressure during matches. This condition also triggered a somatic response, also in the high category (mean 15.74), characterized by body tension and other physiological reactions. Meanwhile, the aspect of impaired concentration was in the moderate category (mean 13), indicating that athletes were still able to maintain focus despite competitive pressure.

Conceptually and empirically, these findings confirm that competitive anxiety in young athletes is strongly influenced by psychological dimensions, particularly cognitive aspects. Therefore, development programs need to systematically and continuously integrate mental readiness strengthening, in addition to physical and technical development.

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