



# The coping strategies used by elite Lebanese athletes in overcoming adversity and achieving excellence.

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## Abstract:

*Elite Lebanese athletes experience transitions in their careers that may greatly influence their advancement. However, understanding has been lacking about the psychological processes at play when these athletes face obstacles on their path to excellence. Therefore, this research aimed to shed light on the adversities they face and the coping mechanisms that contribute to their achievements as they strive for sports excellence. This study included 21 elite athletes from Lebanon (aged 19 to 45; mean = 26, SD = 4.32) who participated in various sports. The sample size does not allow to generalize the results but reflects the reality of the athletes who agreed to participate in this research. During interviews, a holistic approach based on life stories was used to elicit information about the challenges they face and the coping skills they develop, as well as how they employ these skills over the course of their sports development. Results showed that the participants used a variety of coping strategies to deal with the challenges and non-normative transitions they encountered along their path to success and excellence. Ten recurring themes were identified for the non-normative transitions and coping strategies, which were divided into functional or dysfunctional responses. Results showed that these Lebanese athletes face a lack of structural support and specific societal challenges, and they develop vigorous coping skills to reach excellence. This research's quality resides in compiling previously unavailable data on Lebanese athletes, while highlighting the need for further studies to validate findings and explore more coping strategies.*

**Keywords:** (Non-normative transition, adaptability, narratives, adversity, sport excellence )

## Introduction:

One of the key topics of research in sports psychology has been the characterization of the success pathways of elite athletes (Gledhill et al., 2017; MacNamara & Collins, 2010; Murr et al., 2018). Many developmental models have been created based on examples of European or North American athletes. In Lebanon, however, the presence of economic, social, political, religious, and infrastructural challenges suggest that these theoretical models do not fully capture the Lebanese reality (Abou Haidar, 2015; Nassif, 2015), thus requiring exploration beyond the classic models. Holistic models of sports career development, such as the holistic sports career model and the model of sports participation development, have helped understand athletic trajectories (Wylleman & Lavallée, 2004; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007). Moreover, life stories have provided a complementary description of career trajectories, particularly by capturing singularities (e.g., Hauw & Bilard, 2012; Marsollier & Hauw, 2024). Life stories are able to shape the narrative identities of athletes and include such experiences as coping with adversity, such as normative and non-normative transitions, and becoming resilient (Levy et al., 2005; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Life stories also potentially cover the challenges these athletes confront along their journey (Owiti et al., 2021). Given the limited literature on the development of athletes within less privileged contexts, such as many Arab countries and Lebanon, this study aimed to explore how the

accomplishments of elite Lebanese athletes are constructed despite the odds, with a focus on the significant adversities they face.

## Models of Sports Career Development:

Côté's (1999) development model of sports participation (DMSP) and Wylleman's (2016) holistic athlete career (HAC) model provide well-known frameworks for normative athlete transitions. Côté (1999) identified three main stages: initiation, development, and mastery, whereas Gulbin et al. (2013) and Wylleman (2019) focused on the relevant skills needed at each stage. Stambulova et al. (2021) noted that unexpected events during such transitions should also be taken into account. These models help to analyze the factors that interact to influence performance on both sociocultural and individual levels (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Weissensteiner (2017) highlighted the idea that athletes move toward excellence through phases representing a form of progression.

## Narrative Identity in Sport:

One of the cornerstones to understanding athletic trajectories is narrative identity itself (Hardy et al., 2017). According to both McAdams (1993) and McAdams & McLean (2013), narrative identity is a dynamic narrative that provides meaning to life experience by linking the past, present, and expected future through a single thread across the life course. This story acts as an integrative agent across our autobiographical memories to create a coherent and continuous conception of self (Ronkainen et al., 2020). Life

stories, as described by McAdams (1993), are a unique creation of the individual that may contain meaningful experiences, relationships, and events that help shape who we are as individuals. It is a narrative of a reconstructed past, present perspective, and future aspirations to create a coherent self (McAdams et al., 2006). The life story is able to reduce the tension in both the athletic context, where elite athletes experience success and failure in competition (Hauw et al., 2021), and their everyday lives (Douglas & Carless, 2015). Athletes create their own situations utilizing their life experiences (Hauw, 2018). As Cottraux (2001) noted, some people work their way through their experiences to be able to move on, whereas others get stuck in endless repetitions. Yet, conflicts in these narratives must be resolved in order to accomplish major objectives (Paquette & Bigras, 2010). For Masten (2013), resilience is linked to the process of adaptation to adversity through the construction of a life story that facilitates psychological well-being. Therefore, we can use these models of sports development to track athletic progression through career stages (Forté, 2020).

Using a qualitative approach, this study aimed to (1) determine the non-normative transitions (NNTs) present in the journeys of Lebanese athletes based on the HAC approach, (2) examine the coping strategies used in these situations of NNTs, and (3) analyze the athletes' life stories according to McAdams's criteria to determine whether these athletes have had successful athletic careers despite the NNTs throughout their journeys.

#### Materials & Methods:

Subjects Twenty-four high-level athletes were contacted by email with a request to participate in this study. In this request, the goals of the study were explained, and 22 athletes agreed to contribute. Only one athlete requested to stop participating, and this was after the life story interview. The study thus involved 21 high-level Lebanese athletes (between 19 and 45 years old;  $m=26$ ,  $SD=4.32$ ). The ages of the participants reflect a great variability of experience that must be considered to understand the adaptation strategies. Both male and female athletes participated, respectively,  $n=9$  and  $n=12$ ). Participants practiced several sports disciplines: five track & field, one motor sport, six team sports, three winter sports, and six individual sports. The selection of athletes was based on the five-factor classification system proposed by Swann et al. (2015), which defines an elite athlete as one who exhibits a combination of five characteristics: (1) athlete high level of competition, (2) a significant number of years of experience in their sport, (3) success at the highest competition level, (4) a significant portion of their daily life dedicated to practicing their sport, (5) competitiveness of the sport in the athlete's country. Given the absence of a precise national classification system in Lebanon, this study defined elite athletes using these specific criteria. Therefore, the classification of the 21 Lebanese athletes as elite is justified as they meet the conditions outlined by Swan et al. (2018). Furthermore, given the limited number of high-level athletes in general in Lebanon, the sample size of 21 represents a convenient sample of Lebanese elite athletes (Table 1).

**Table (1)**  
**Description of the 21 elite Lebanese athlete**

<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Athlete</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sexe</i>	<i>Profession</i>
<i>Individual Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 14</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Student</i>
<i>Individual Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 2</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Student</i>
<i>Individual Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 10</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Trainer/Coach</i>
<i>Individual Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 6</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Employed</i>
<i>Individual Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 17</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Employed</i>
<i>Individual Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 3</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Student</i>
<i>Individual Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 19</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Employed</i>
<i>Individual Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 12</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Trainer/Coach</i>
<i>Individual Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 13</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Employed</i>
<i>Individual Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 9</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Trainer/Coach</i>
<i>Individual Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 11</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Profession Libérale</i>
<i>Individual Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 4</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Professional Athlete</i>

<i>Individual Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 5</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Professional Athlete</i>
<i>Individual Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 7</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Professional Athlete</i>
<i>Individual Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 16</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Employed</i>
<i>Team Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 21</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Employed</i>
<i>Team Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 15</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Professional Athlete</i>
<i>Team Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 18</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Professional Athlete</i>
<i>Team Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 1</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Professional Athlete</i>
<i>Team Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 8</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Trainer/Coach</i>
<i>Team Sport</i>	<i>Athlete 20</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Employed</i>

### Study Design:

The interviews were conducted according to a set of predefined themes (McAdams, 2008), including life chapters, pivotal moments, challenges, primary figures, future developments, and personal beliefs. This structure ensured the capture of comprehensive and detailed narratives, reflecting the life trajectories of the athletes and the strategies they employed to navigate their professional and personal journeys. The following topics were addressed in turn: (1) chapters: athletes were invited to arrange their lives like a book that contains chapters, thus having the opportunity to order their lived experiences; (2) key scenes: they were asked to accurately describe four to six key scenes of their lives; (3) life challenges or stress and problems: the notions of conflict and imbalance (and having the strength to overcome) were introduced so that the athletes could reveal a past obstacle and present obstacles in two areas of life; (4) main characters: the athletes could talk about groups, an organization or an institution, parents, children, relatives, spouse, lover, friends, teachers, colleagues, and supervisors, mentioning those with positive or a negative influences; (5) future plots: the athletes were asked to build in imagination the continuation of their life stories, stating what the next chapters of their story might be and including positive and negative futures; (6) personal beliefs and values: they identified personal life philosophies by considering their fundamental values (personal, religious, and political) and representing the developmental history of these values; and (7) life theme: at the end of the narrative, they were asked to present a single integrative theme for their life stories. Prior to the interviews, the participants were informed of the nature of the study and provided their consent to participate. The principles of confidentiality and anonymity were thoroughly respected throughout the study, with data secured and accessible only to the principal researcher. The ethical principles set forth by the American Psychological Association (APA) were maintained throughout the research process.

### Experimental Procedures:

Once institutional ethical approval was given (Project Number: E\_SSP\_062021\_00001), individual interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. Data were collected through semi-structured videoconference interviews, in accordance with the sanitary guidelines in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic. To support the reconstruction of the narrative, participants were provided with a timeline on which they could place their transitions. Drash and Matthes (2013) suggested that the use of a timeline enhances the accuracy and capacity for retrospective recollection, and this approach has been demonstrated to be relevant in a number of other studies (Hauw & Lemeur, 2013). No questionnaires were employed, instead, an interview method based on a well-established and validated qualitative research procedure (McAdams, 1993, 2006a, 2006b) was used. This approach has been extensively applied in various studies (Hunt, 2023; Tumer et al., 2021), including research in sports (Owiti et al., 2021a, 2021b). Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and allowed participants to freely share their life stories structured around the key elements of McAdams's (1993) model. The interviews covered a range of topics, like pivotal moments, obstacles encountered, significant interpersonal connections, and personal values.

### Data Analysis:

After collecting the life stories through Zoom-recorded interviews, a complete transcription was carried out following the precise structure of McAdams' model. Audio files were converted into text files and supplemented with notes taken during the interviews.

### Initial Coding:

The narratives of 21 athletes were coded in terms of career or life transitions. Passages across these transitions were consistent with progression from one stage of athletic development to the next (i.e., sampling, specialization, investment) (Côté, 1999; Wylleman et al., 1999) using the DMSP (Côté, 1999) and the HAC model (Wylleman et al., 1999). The events were positioned on a timeline from zero to 35 years in 5-year increments. Such models have been used as contexts for various studies concentrating on talent

development in a diversity of social systems (Tshube, 2021).

From the collected transitions, the NNTs – that is, the unexpected happenings in these athletes' lives (financial difficulties, lack of sport facilities, or war) (Wylleman & Lavallée, 2004) – were chosen, and the verbatim transcripts were converted into raw themes across these 21 life narratives. The data describing the adaptation strategies used in response to each of the NNTs were recoded into raw themes. All codings were placed under first order themes, which were analyzed (inductive content analysis; Thomas, 2006). As coding continued, themes identified from one transcript informed how the next transcript was processed, similar to the constant comparative method (Holt & Tamminen, 2010). Discussions continued until the coders reached a consensus on the second order themes. According to the principle of theoretical saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), the analysis ended when the second order themes did not bring anything new. This analysis yielded a list of ten common themes of NNTs and adaptation strategies.

#### Second Coding:

We examined the adaptation strategies identified in the 21 athletes according to their nature (functional or

dysfunctional). This classification was based on the work of Carver et al. (1989), who suggested that functional strategies enable individuals to adapt effectively to novel circumstances and mitigate stress levels. Such strategies facilitate healthy adjustment and preserve quality of life. In contrast, dysfunctional strategies, which are characterized by avoidance or disengagement (Parker & Endler, 1996), do not lessen stress and result in maladjustment, which is shown by withdrawal from the situation.

#### Third Coding:

Each life story was subjected to individual analysis in order to discern successful athletic careers. In accordance with McAdams's (1993) theory, a successful career or life story is based on six criteria: coherence, openness, credibility, differentiation, reconciliation, and generative integration (Table 2). The presence of these criteria in each narrative was carefully evaluated following the methodology described by him. In parallel, research conducted with Lebanese federations and the National Olympic Committee allowed us to compile a record of the remarkable achievements of Lebanese athletes in general over the past 4 years, showing the uniqueness of their athletic accomplishments despite repeated adversity in the country.

**Table (2)**  
**Criteria, indices, and illustrations of a successful life course according to McAdams (1993)**

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Indices</i>	<i>Illustration</i>
<i>Coherence</i>	- <i>Presence of significance for events within one's own culture</i>	- <i>Disability and life mission</i>
<i>Openness</i>	- <i>Flexibility</i> - <i>Resilience</i>	- <i>Change of discipline</i> - <i>Overcoming racism and bullying</i>
<i>Credibility</i>	- <i>The story is grounded in the real world in which the storytellers live</i>	- <i>Lack of support for sports</i>
<i>Differentiation</i>	- <i>Story rich in character</i> - <i>Story rich in plot</i> - <i>Story rich in theme</i>	- <i>Political and social context in Lebanon</i> - <i>Injuries, loss of loved ones, immigration</i>
<i>Reconciliation</i>	- <i>Difficult questions</i> - <i>Dynamic contradictions</i> - <i>Narrative solution affirming the harmony and integrity of the story</i>	- <i>Acquiring a passport, reaching high levels despite a disability</i> - <i>Representing women of color in Lebanon</i>
<i>Generative Integration</i>	- <i>Functioning as a productive and active member of society</i> - <i>Adult roles in the spheres of work and family</i> - <i>Ability and desire to guide the next generation</i> - <i>Contribution to humanity</i>	- <i>Creating an NGO to provide financial aid to the people of Lebanon</i> - <i>Continuing studies to induce change in the Lebanese sports community</i>

## RESULTS:

### Common Themes of Non-Normative Transitions

Further analysis of the content of the NNTs and adaptation strategies yielded the following list of common themes: (1) traumatic events and personal losses, (2) financial problems and lack of support, (3) injuries and cessation of sports practice, (4) change of sports discipline or club, (5) family

and social pressures, (6) academic difficulties and balancing sports career and studies, (7) immigration and pursuit of a sports career abroad, (8) conflicts with sports authorities and corruption, (9) prejudice and discrimination, and (10) physical or mental suffering.

Data analysis showed that the 21 athletes faced a high number of NNTs during their athletic careers (N=112 NNTs) from the age of 3 to 45 years (Table 3). By coding the athletes' statements into themes, we noted that among

the ten themes, the most common were traumatic events and personal losses (18.75%), financial problems and lack of support (13.39%), and injuries and cessation of sports practice (12.5%).

**Table (3)**  
**Common Themes of the non-normative transitions**

<i>Themes of non-normative transition (NNT)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Traumatic events and personal losses</i>	<i>18.75</i>
<i>Financial problems and lack of support</i>	<i>13.39</i>
<i>Injuries and cessation of sports practice</i>	<i>12.5</i>
<i>Change of sports discipline or clubs</i>	<i>10.71</i>
<i>Family and social pressure</i>	<i>10.71</i>
<i>Academic difficulties and balancing a sports career with studies</i>	<i>8.92</i>
<i>Immigration and pursuit of a sports career abroad</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Conflicts with sports authorities and corruption</i>	<i>7.14</i>
<i>Prejudice and discrimination</i>	<i>6.25</i>
<i>Physical or mental suffering</i>	<i>3.57</i>

*N: number of non-normative transitions*

Regarding the domains to which these NNTs belonged (Table 4), we noted a distribution according to the five domains specified by Stambulova and Wylleman (2014) in their holistic approach. Indeed, the highest percentages appeared in the athletic domain (33.03%) and the psychosocial domain (26.78%).

**Table (4)**  
**Domains of non-normative transitions according to Stambulova and Wylleman (2014)**

<i>Domains of NNT</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>	<i>Domains of NNT</i>
<i>Athletic</i>	<i>33.03</i>	<i>21.7 ±6.8</i>
<i>Psychosocial</i>	<i>26.78</i>	<i>17±8.6</i>
<i>Financial</i>	<i>16.96</i>	<i>20.8±6.3</i>
<i>Psychological</i>	<i>14.28</i>	<i>20.1±7</i>
<i>Academic</i>	<i>8.92</i>	<i>19.6±6</i>

#### **Categorization of Adaptation Strategies and Correlation with NNTs:**

Similarly, the data expressing the adaptation strategies used to deal with the NNTs were converted into ten recurring themes: (1) perseverance and athletic achievements, (2) seeking ways to continue the sports career, (3) managing personal challenges, (4) travel and relocation, (5) investment in the rehabilitation process, (6) academic achievement, (7) change of discipline, (8) fighting corruption and injustice, (9) demotivation and depression, and (10) impulsivity and self-destruction. Analyses of the 21 athletes' responses to the NNTs revealed that most of the adaptation strategies were functional, representing 82.14% of the total. Dysfunctional strategies were much less numerous, constituting only 17.86%. The adaptation strategies, divided between functional and dysfunctional registers, were organized around ten themes. Of these themes, eight were functional. The most frequently used strategy was perseverance and athletic achievements, representing 34.77% of all strategies. The remaining two themes were dysfunctional, with the most frequent being demotivation and

depression, found in 65% of the cases (Table 5), and a repetitive theme “managing personal challenges” where functional and dysfunctional coping strategies were used.

**Table (5)**  
**Common themes of the coping strategies**

<i>Coping strategies</i>		<i>Percentage %</i>
<b>Functional strategies (n=92)</b>		<b>82.14</b>
<i>Perseverance and athletic achievements</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>34.77</i>
<i>Managing personal challenges</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>19.56</i>
<i>Seeking ways to continue the sports career</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>13.04</i>
<i>Travel and relocation</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>8.69</i>
<i>Investment in the rehabilitation process</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>6.52</i>
<i>Academic achievement</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>6.52</i>
<i>Change of discipline</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>6.52</i>
<i>Fighting corruption and injustice</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>4.34</i>
<b>Dysfunctional Strategies (n=20)</b>		<b>17.86</b>
<i>Demotivation and depression</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>65</i>
<i>Impulsivity and self-destruction</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Managing personal challenges</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>15</i>

*N=number of non-normative transitions*

*n=number of strategies*

Lastly, Pearson's correlation test revealed significant correlations between different domains but mainly between the psychological domain of the NNTs and the functionality of adaptation strategies. Indeed, the psychological domain is negatively correlated to the functional coping strategy ( $R=-0.21$ ;  $p=0.04$ ) and positively correlated to dysfunctional coping strategy ( $R=0.21$ ;  $p=0.04$ ). This means that as the domain of an NNT becomes more psychological, the likelihood of using a functional strategy decreases and of using a dysfunctional strategy increase (Table 6).

**Table (6)**  
**Correlation between NNT domains and the coping strategies' functionality**

	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>
<b>1- Athletic domain</b>	-						
<b>2- Psychological domain</b>	-.29**	-					
<b>3- Psychosocial domain</b>	-.42**	-.25**	-				
<b>4- Financial domain</b>	-.32**	-0.18	-.27**	-			
<b>5- Academic domain</b>	-.22*	-0.19	-.19*	-0.12	-		
<b>6- Functional coping strategy</b>	-0.12	-.21*	0.18	0.09	0.06	-	
<b>7- Dysfunctional coping strategy</b>	0.12	.21*	-0.18	-0.09	-0.06	-1.00**	-

*Number: Coefficient of correlations (R)*

*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.*

### Successful Journeys according to McAdams:

The analysis of the 21 athlete narratives revealed great conformity to the six criteria of narrative success proposed by McAdams (1993). Indeed, 15 of the athletes' narratives integrated all of these criteria (68.2%), whereas six presented only a part of them (31.8%). These results suggest that, overall, the journeys of the athletes were indeed successful journeys according to McAdams's model.

These Lebanese athletes have shown an effective adaptation to adversity, as demonstrated by their achievements in sports, particularly during the challenging period between 2020 and 2024.

### DISCUSSION:

The objective of this study was to examine (1) the non-normative transitions present in the journeys of Lebanese athletes based on the holistic athlete career approach, (2) the coping strategies used in these NNT situations by the 21 Lebanese athletes, and 3) the athletes' life stories according to McAdams's criteria to determine whether the athletes had had successful athletic careers despite the NNTs throughout their journeys.

**Non-Normative Transitions and Adversity** Gullich and Emrich (2006) suggested that young athletes who initially demonstrate high performance but lack robust psychological and social support may encounter difficulties in attaining elite levels of success, in contrast to those who invest in personal development programs throughout their lives. Conversely, Sarkar and Fletcher (2014) observed that confronting disparate adversities, such as injuries or personal losses, can facilitate the development of resilience, confidence, and adaptive strategies in athletes. The researchers discovered that adversity plays a pivotal role in the psychological development and performance of Olympic athletes, enabling them to attain high levels of achievement when they have access to effective coaching and social support. Indeed, Côté and Fraser-Thomas (2007) concurred that social support from athletes' entourages was vital for long-term sports participation. These studies underscore the necessity of a supportive environment for the pursuit of excellence, a concept that is particularly relevant for Lebanese athletes, who confront persistent challenges. Indeed, Zerzouri (2006) posited that political, economic, and social factors can exert a profound influence on the trajectory of an athlete's career. In the course of our study, the Lebanese athletes were compelled to navigate a multitude of NNTs due to the confluence of economic, social, and political challenges, with an average of 5.28 NNTs encountered across their careers. These transitions were influenced by a number of factors, including sectarianism (Nseir, 2012), financial constraints, and limited governmental support (Nassif & Amara, 2015), as well as the semi-professionalism that characterizes Lebanese sports (Abou Haidar, 2015). NNTs frequently occurred between the ages of 15 and 25, a period during which athletes must navigate the challenge of balancing sports with other life demands, including education and career development (Côté, 1999; Jowett & Wylleman, 2006; Stambulova, 2010). In contrast to the support that Swiss athletes receive, Lebanese athletes are subjected to additional pressure from familial expectations and an unstable political environment, intensified by a lack of transparent funding (Nassif & Amara, 2015). As previously noted by Kiuppis and Stambulova (2020), athletes must

navigate a multitude of societal challenges, family obligations, career planning, and political changes, all of which profoundly impact their experiences (Ekengren et al., 2020). The personal losses resulting from the Beirut port explosion and the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic contributed to the elevated stress levels experienced by these athletes. Evans et al. (2020) emphasized that such disturbances significantly impact the mental health and well-being of athletes, while Lavallée (2005) underscored that non-athletic transitions can be particularly challenging. **Adaptation Strategies Employed** Although non-athletic transitions have the potential to negatively impact an athlete's mental health (Park et al., 2013), our search into the lived experiences of the Lebanese athletes revealed that they possess a notable adaptive capacity in the face of adversity. Their strategies are represented by the phrase "perseverance and athletic achievement," reflecting the manner in which the athletes cope with the challenges they encounter in their lives. These problem-focused strategies, which Lebanese athletes employ, emphasize the determination of these athletes to overcome challenges by relying on their past achievements (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014). They emphasized that perseverance-focused adaptation strategies indicate exceptional resilience. These athletes were aware that a transition could be regarded as an opportunity for personal growth and the development of inner strength (Galli & Gonzalez, 2015). In a longitudinal study, Costa et al. (1996) identified humor and perseverance as two key coping mechanisms employed by athletes in response to various stressful situations, including losses, threats, and challenges. In addition, a problem-focused coping strategy has been shown to have a positive association with athletic performance (Pensgaard et al., 2003). This finding has been replicated in numerous research studies across diverse fields.

### The Success of Lebanese Athletes in Adverse Conditions

This research examined the life histories of 21 high-level Lebanese athletes to determine how they responded to adversity and achieved athletic success. Despite the significant challenges they encountered, including sociopolitical instability and economic unpredictability, these athletes exhibited noteworthy resilience and adaptability. The results of this study are consistent with the identity development model proposed by McAdams (1993), indicating that these athletes have successfully integrated their athletic experiences into their broader life narratives. By developing effective coping strategies and maintaining a strong sense of purpose, they have successfully surmounted obstacles and achieved notable successes in their respective sports. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould et

al., 2002) that have emphasized the role of adversity in athletic success.

**Limitations** This study also points toward some limitations and perspectives for further research. The sample size does not allow to generalize the results but reflects the reality of the athletes who agreed to participate in this research. Furthermore, the ages of the participants also reflect a great variability of experience that must be considered to understand the adaptation strategies. In addition, semi-structured interviews are aimed at collecting detailed data, but they also come with bias possibilities such as the

### Conclusions:

This research confirmed the flexibility and resilience which Lebanese athletes develop through multiple challenges. Their journeys show how, in spite of scarce means and societal barriers, mental strength can be developed and ways of succeeding within and outside of sports can be found. The adversities they deal with not only improve their athletic skills, but also significantly contribute to their personal development and their life purpose. The accomplishments of these athletes are an indication that sports can support them to bounce back from failures to greater chances of achieving excellence. A number of practical applications arise from this study, and these are relevant in many domains, including sports psychology, sports career management and athlete support program development. Recommendations can also be made to enhance the experiences of Lebanese athletes. It is important to improve the access to psychological care and sports facilities and to enhance the role played by support staff. It would also be useful to include mental health and career development in athlete's programs in order to encourage comprehensive athlete health and performance.

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