

# Identifying Barriers to the Female Athlete Triad among Collegiate Athletes in India: A Qualitative Biopsychosocial Analysis

AMISHA DEHADRAYA<sup>1</sup>, JOYDIP SAHA<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The Female Athlete Triad (FAT) is characterised by low energy availability, menstrual dysfunction, and impaired bone health, and presents a significant yet understudied health risk for female athletes in India. Despite global recognition, research on the sociocultural and institutional barriers to its identification and management within the Indian context remains scarce, particularly among developmental athletes.

**Aim:** This study aimed to explore and construct a comprehensive barrier framework hindering the recognition, reporting, and management of the Female Athlete Triad among developmental female athletes in India.

**Materials and Methods:** A qualitative study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with two developmental female athletes (aged 13-19) purposively sampled from sports academies in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, guided by the Biopsychosocial (BPS) model as the theoretical framework to categorise emerging barriers.

**Results:** Seven key themes were identified across three BPS domains. In the Biological Domain, themes included Normalised Physiologic Distress (dismissal of symptoms like fatigue and amenorrhoea as normal) and Unmistakable Performance Decline (direct impact on athletic output). The Psychological Domain revealed, Knowledge Void and Awareness Gap, Performance Driven Body Image (internalisation of the "lean=fast" ideal) and The Dual Fear: Stigma and De-Selection (fear of judgment and reduced playing time). The Sociological Domain highlighted the Absence of Safe, Confidential Institutional Channels, Gendered Dynamics in Coach-Athlete Communication, and a Culture of Silence and Judgment.

**Conclusion:** Addressing the Female Athlete Triad (FAT) among Indian developmental athletes is hindered by barriers. These barriers are interconnected across biological, psychological, and socio-cultural domains, necessitating an integrated and multi-faceted approach for the holistic development of the female athlete.

**Keywords:** Body image, Communication, Fatigue.

## PARTICULARS OF CONTRIBUTORS:

1. Postgraduate Student, Abhinav Bindra Sports Medicine and Research Institute, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India.
2. Associate Professor, Abhinav Bindra Sports Medicine and Research Institute, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India.

## NAME, ADDRESS, E-MAIL ID OF THE CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Joydip Saha,  
Associate Professor, Department of Movement Science, Abhinav Bindra Sports Medicine and Research Institute, Bhubaneswar-751024, Odisha, India.  
Email: joydipsaha77@gmail.com