ACADEMIA International Journal for Social Sciences
Volume 5, Issue 3(s8), 2026 ISSN-L (Online): 3006-6638

Weight Pressure and Its Influence on Body Image and Social Physique Anxiety in University Football Players

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Received: 25-01-2026 **Revised:** 09-02-2026 **Accepted:** 23-02-2026 **Published:** 11-03-2026

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the effects of weight pressure on body image and social physique anxiety (SPA) among university football players. In competitive sports, body weight and appearance are a major concern for athletes and that may have a negative impact on the mental health and well-being of the athletes. Athletes, for example in team sports such as football, may be put under pressure from teammates, coaches, and the sporting world in general to fit in with respect to body composition. The purpose of this study was to explore the weight pressure, body image dissatisfaction, and social physique anxiety relationships among male university football players. A cross-sectional survey design was used and the data was gathered from 160 male football players of public and private universities. The participants were selected by purposive sampling in which only those who were actively playing football in university were included in the study. Self-administered questionnaires were used to measure perceived weight pressure from coaches, teammates, and institutional practices, body image satisfaction, and social physique anxiety, with the Weight Pressures & Social Physique Anxiety Scale in Sport (WPSS) serving as a measure of perceived weight pressure. The results of the study demonstrated that there is a significant correlation between weight pressure and body image dissatisfaction among the University football players. Furthermore, there was a significant correlation between weight pressure and social physique anxiety indicating that players who feel pressure about their weight are more prone to social physique anxiety, which is the feeling of anxiety about one's physical appearance and how they are judged by others. The results suggest that body image concerns and social physique anxiety are not isolated issues but are interrelated and exacerbated by weight pressures in the football environment. The results showed the importance of increasing the awareness and intervention in sports to tackle the psychological impacts of weight pressure. Coaches and sports organizations should strive to diminish unrealistic weight standards and to build a mental health environment that promotes self-acceptance and body positivity. Overall, the study highlights the need for a comprehensive strategy that addresses all aspects of an

athlete's health, including their mental state, as well as their physical condition, in order to optimize their performance and overall satisfaction with their sport.

Keywords: Weight pressure, body image satisfaction, university football players, social physique anxiety, sports physiology.

INTRODUCTION

The study of sports psychology has focused more on the psychological and social aspects that impact athletes' performance and well-being. Of these, body image and weight concerns are prominent concerns, especially in competitive activities where body appearance, fitness, and performance are frequently looked at. The body appearance of athletes is evaluated in addition to their skills, which can generate external and/or internal pressure to keep the body in a specific appearance (International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 2023). Body image is a complex phenomenon that reflects internal and external factors (e.g., media, peers, coaches) and has a major effect on mental health and athletic performance. In sport, especially football, there is a high expectation of body composition and body shape, putting pressure on the sportsperson that can result in high body dissatisfaction (Mills, 2020).

In recent years, a number of studies have indicated that social physique anxiety (SPA) is a major factor in the impact of external weight pressures on the individual's internal body image (i.e., self-perception and self-satisfaction). Symptoms of SPA include worry, shame, or embarrassment about the way one's body is seen by others, particularly in places where people are focused on their appearance, such as sporting events. An emotional state that encompasses people's concerns about how their body is perceived by others has been operationalized as the construct (Chen, 2023) particularly salient for athletes whose bodies are frequently publicly evaluated.

Preliminary studies indicate that evaluative demands from coaches and peers could worsen SPA in athletic settings. For instance, in cheerleading, when coaches or peers provide meta-perceptions of body image, they lead to increased SPA, and are associated with disordered eating behaviors (Hausenblas, 2002). At the same time, footballers often find themselves under pressure to fit into their position, with goalkeepers, defenders, and attackers expected to have different body types for each position, thus providing fertile ground for the emergence of SPA (Kaye, 2024).

The study of body image and weight concerns has been well-documented in sports, especially when the sport is aesthetic and/or weight-sensitive like gymnastics and wrestling (Thompson & Sherman, 2020). But little focus has been placed on other team sports such as football, where there can be tremendous pressure on athletes due to the physical appearance and weight requirements. Football has traditionally focused on fitness and body composition, sometimes resulting in increased attention being paid to athletes' bodies (Reel et al., 2021). Social physique anxiety (SPA) is a construct based on self-presentation theory that has been identified as an important psychological factor affecting athletes' wellbeing (Hart et al., 2022). Knowing how it relates to football can give a good insight into what mental health issues can be seen in athletes.

Weight pressure is a sense of pressure on athletes to be a certain weight or body type, which may be encouraged by coaches, teammates, fans or expectations. The constant pressure of being overweight can have adverse effects on the self-image and mental well-being of athletes. If athletes consider their worth based on their body image, they can develop a negative body image that can affect their confidence and performance (Martín-Rodríguez, A., & Clemente-Suárez, V. J.). (2025).

Objectives

1. To determine the relationship between weight pressure and body image in university football players.

2. To study the relationship between weight pressure and social physique anxiety.

H^1: There will be a significant relationship between weight pressure and body image in university football players.

H_2: There will be significant relationship between weight pressure and social physique anxiety in university football players.

H_3: There will be significant relationship between body image and social physique anxiety in university football players.

ATERIALS AND METHODS

Work and Facilities Available

The study population comprises of football players from university teams. Coaches gave permission to give questionnaires prior to training or after practice.

Work and Methodology Adopted

This study has been based on quantitative research with cross-sectional survey design. This was suitable for the study of the relationship between weight pressure and body image in football players, when considering the role of social physique anxiety (SPA).

Methods of Data Collection

The data for this study were collected using self-administered questionnaires, distributed to footballers either pre or post training. The participants were given a briefing on the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and gave detailed instructions for completing the survey. Weight Pressures & Social Physique Anxiety Scale in Sport (WPSS) was used to assess the perceived weight pressures from coaches, teammates and the sport environment (Nugent, 2020). The focus of this tool was on weigh-ins, expectations with regards to the uniform, and comments pertaining to appearance in sport-specific contexts. Self-perception and satisfaction with body image was also evaluated, including both cognitive and affective aspects of body evaluation.

Sample Size

Sample size consisted of 160 participants. Male: 160

Sampling Technique and Procedure

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria. Since the research specifically focused on male football players, only individuals who were actively participating in football at the university were included. This approach ensured that the sample represented the target population relevant to the research objectives. A total of 160 participants were

recruited from university football teams. Prior permission was obtained from coaches, team managers, and relevant authorities to approach players before sessions and after sessions at inter universities football competition.

Inclusion criteria

- Male football players of university level.
- Public and private universities students.

Exclusion criteria

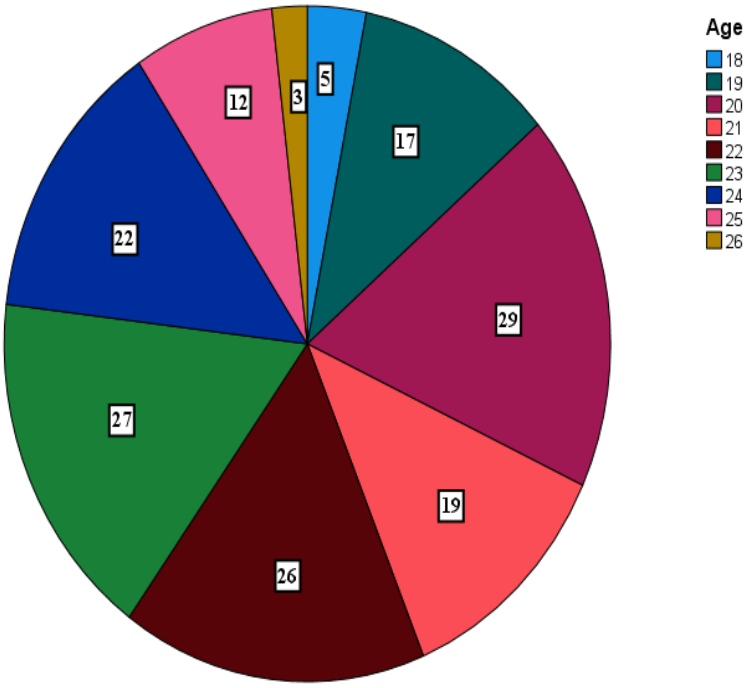
Other than university-level players were not permitted to participate.

Statistical Analysis

- Cronbach's Alpha was used to check reliability of questionnaire
- Pearson correlation was used check relationship

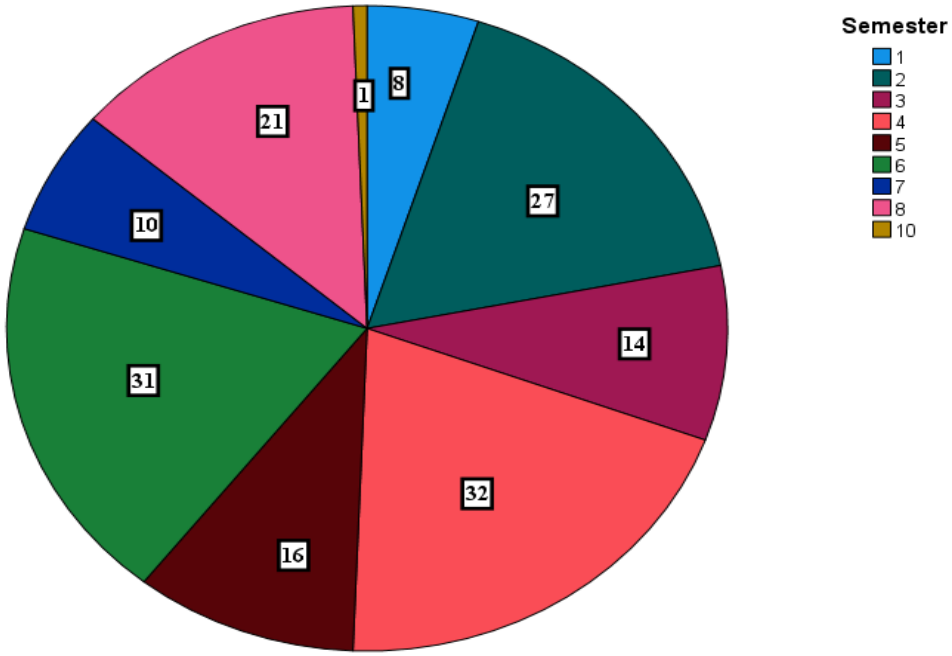
RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Figure 1



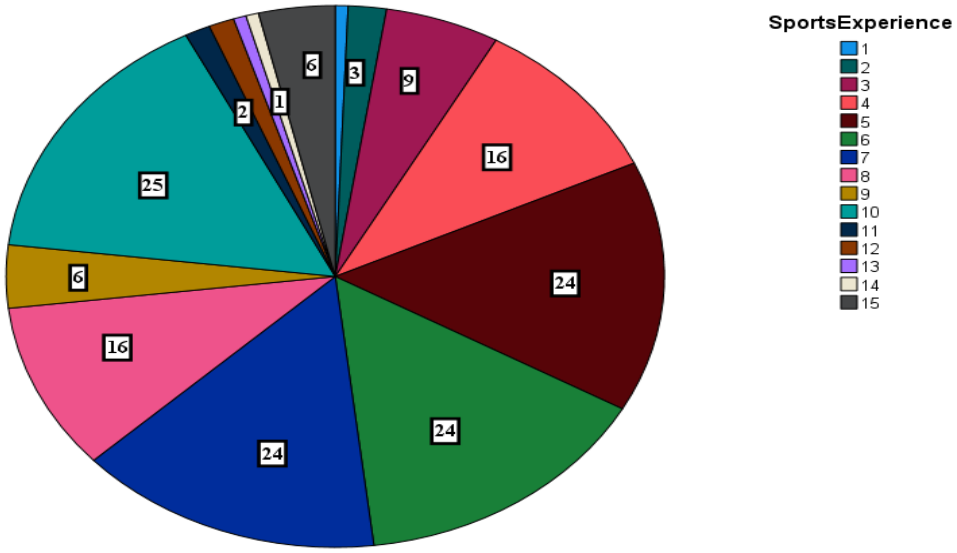
Note. The following pie chart displays the age distribution of people. Most people are in their early to mid-20s with age 23 (29) being the highest number, age 26 (27), and age 24 (26). A moderate proportion of people are aged 22 (22 people) and 21 (17 people), and age 19 (12 people) has a smaller proportion. There are very few people aged 18 (5) or 20 (3). the data is relatively clustered between 21 and 26 years of age, and there is less data at the lower end.

Figure 2



Note. The following pie chart represents the distribution of people according to the semester they are studying. Both red and dark green colors have the largest number of people in Semester 8 (32) and Semester 6 (31), respectively. There are more people in these two semesters than the rest of the chart. There are 21 pink (Semester 3), 27 green (Semester 4), and 14 dark red (Semester 7) people who are moderately represented. The number of individuals in each category is fairly even but less than that in Semesters 6 and 8. There are less individuals in Semester 1 (blue) and Semester 5 (dark blue) as they are the smallest groups.

Figure 3



Note. The following pie chart shows the distribution of people's experience with sports. Each segment has been shaded in a different color with the numbers representing the number of people in each category. The largest portion (teal) is category 1 (25), while category 9 (24) and category 16 (24) are the next largest portions. Other segments have fewer numbers, for example, category 6, 6 people, and category 2, 1 participant. The chart assigns each segment to a category based on a colour key, to show the distribution of participants among the 15 categories.

Table 1

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	**N of Items**
.809	14

Note. The reliability statistic shown means the Cronbach's Alpha for the 14 items is 0.809. Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of internal consistency which shows the interrelatedness of a set of items. A value of 0.809 indicates good reliability, with scores of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable, meaning that all the items are tapping into the same underlying concept. Thus, the internal consistency of the 14 items in this case is high and the items can be trusted in the subsequent analyses or applications.

Table 2

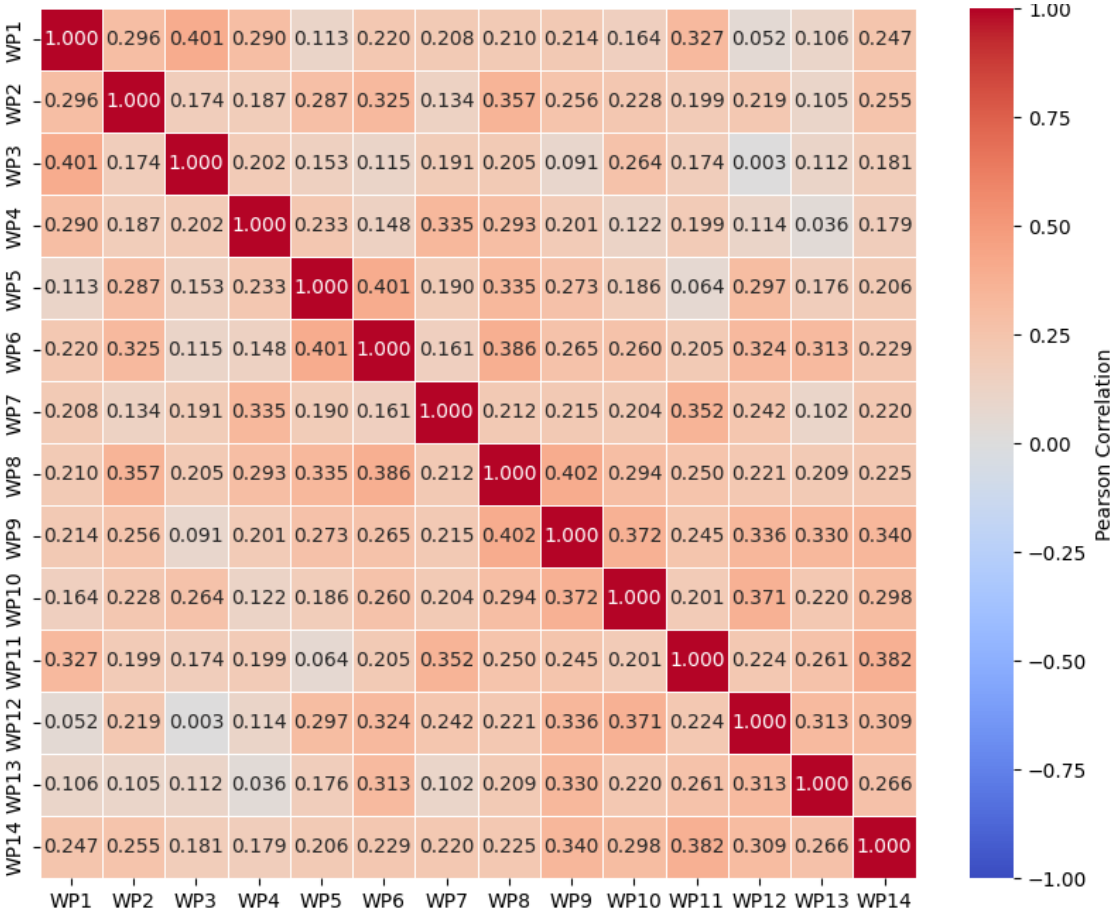
Correlations															
		WP1	**WP2**	**WP3**	**WP4**	**WP5**	**WP6**	**WP7**	**WP8**	**WP9**	**WP10**	**WP11**	**WP12**	**WP13**	**WP14**
WPS1	**Pearson Correlation**	1	.296**	.401**	.290**	.113	.220**	.208**	.210**	.214**	.164*	.327**	.052	.106	.247**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.155	.005	.008	.008	.006	.038	.000	.510	.184	.002
	N	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160
WPS2	**Pearson Correlation**	.296**	1	.174*	.187*	.287**	.325**	.134	.357**	.256**	.228**	.199*	.219**	.105	.255**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.027	.018	.000	.000	.092	.000	.001	.004	.012	.005	.185	.001
	N	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160
WPS3	**Pearson Correlation**	.401**	.174*	1	.202*	.153	.115	.191*	.205**	.091	.264**	.174*	.003	.112	.181*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.027		.010	.053	.149	.016	.009	.251	.001	.027	.972	.160	.022
	N	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160
WPS4	**Pearson Correlation**	.290**	.187*	.202*	1	.233**	.148	.335**	.293**	.201*	.122	.199*	.114	.036	.179*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.018	.010		.003	.062	.000	.000	.011	.126	.012	.150	.649	.023
	N	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160
WPS5	**Pearson Correlation**	.113	.287**	.153	.233**	1	.401**	.190*	.335**	.273**	.186*	.064	.297**	.176*	.206**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.155	.000	.053	.003		.000	.016	.000	.000	.019	.420	.000	.026	.009

	N	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160
WPS6	**Pearson Correlation**	.220**	.325**	.115	.148	.401**	1	.161*	.386**	.265**	.260**	.205**	.324**	.313**	.229**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.000	.149	.062	.000		.041	.000	.001	.001	.009	.000	.000	.004
	N	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160
WPS7	**Pearson Correlation**	.208**	.134	.191*	.335**	.190*	.161*	1	.212**	.215**	.204**	.352**	.242**	.102	.220**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.092	.016	.000	.016	.041		.007	.006	.010	.000	.002	.199	.005
	N	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160
WPS8	**Pearson Correlation**	.210**	.357**	.205**	.293**	.335**	.386**	.212**	1	.402**	.294**	.250**	.221**	.209**	.225**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.000	.009	.000	.000	.000	.007		.000	.000	.001	.005	.008	.004
	N	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160
WPS9	**Pearson Correlation**	.214**	.256**	.091	.201*	.273**	.265**	.215**	.402**	1	.372**	.245**	.336**	.330**	.340**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.001	.251	.011	.000	.001	.006	.000		.000	.002	.000	.000	.000
	N	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160
WPS10	**Pearson Correlation**	.164*	.228**	.264**	.122	.186*	.260**	.204**	.294**	.372**	1	.201*	.371**	.220**	.298**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.038	.004	.001	.126	.019	.001	.010	.000	.000		.011	.000	.005	.000
	N	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160
WPS11	**Pearson Correlation**	.327**	.199*	.174*	.199*	.064	.205**	.352**	.250**	.245**	.201*	1	.224**	.261**	.382**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.012	.027	.012	.420	.009	.000	.001	.002	.011		.004	.001	.000
	N	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160
WPS12	**Pearson Correlation**	.052	.219**	.003	.114	.297**	.324**	.242**	.221**	.336**	.371**	.224**	1	.313**	.309**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.510	.005	.972	.150	.000	.000	.002	.005	.000	.000	.004		.000	.000
	N	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160
WPS13	**Pearson Correlation**	.106	.105	.112	.036	.176*	.313**	.102	.209**	.330**	.220**	.261**	.313**	1	.266**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.184	.185	.160	.649	.026	.000	.199	.008	.000	.005	.001	.000		.001
	N	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160
WPS14	**Pearson Correlation**	.247**	.255**	.181*	.179*	.206**	.229**	.220**	.225**	.340**	.298**	.382**	.309**	.266**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.001	.022	.023	.009	.004	.005	.004	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	
	N	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160	160

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note. The following correlation matrix illustrates the correlations between different Weight Pressure (WPS1 - WPS14) with the Pearson correlation value and the significance level. A number of positive associations are significant at the 0.01 level (indicated as) for several sets of pairs (e.g., WPS1 and WPS3, 0.401; WPS6 and WPS9, 0.386; WPS10 and WPS12, 0.371). These correlations show moderate to strong positive relationships, which means that if one weight pressure factor goes up, the others go up. Other correlations, such as WPS5:WP6 (0.401) and WPS13:WP6 (0.313) are highly significant. But there are also some low or non-significant correlations (e.g., WPS4 with WPS13). The significance levels (2-tailed) indicate the strength and reliability of the relationships. For example, the correlation between WPS1 and WPS5 is 0.113 with a non-significant p-value, indicating that there is no strong linear correlation between weight pressure factors WPS1 and WPS5.

Figure 3: ***Correlation Matrix of Weight Pressures, Body Image, Social Physique Anxiety***



Note. This correlation matrix is a graphical representation of the Pearson correlation between the different weight pressures (WP1 to WP14). The heat map indicates that there are significant positive correlations between the weight pressure that are shown in red, with values ranging from -1 (strong negative) to 1 (strong positive), such as between WP1 and WP3 (0.401), WP5 and WP6 (0.401) and WP8 and WP9 (0.402). These correlations indicate a moderate to strong positive correlation between these weight

pressure, body image and social physique anxiety that means that they have a tendency to increase together. The matrix can be used to identify pairs of work packages that have strong associations, which may be useful to inform decision-making and analysis in project management.

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to investigate the effect of weight pressure on body image and social physique anxiety (SPA) of the university football players. The findings of the study showed that there was a significant and strong relationship between weight pressure and body image dissatisfaction.. The results revealed that SPA was found to be significant in enhancing the negative effect of weight pressure. This aligns with the findings of Chen (2023), who highlighted that SPA can exacerbate body image issues. An athlete's concern about what others, especially coaches and teammates, think of his/her body can result in increased dissatisfaction with that body. The results indicate that SPA is not a standalone phenomenon, but rather is intricately tied to weight pressure, leading to an even greater impact of weight-related stress. This aligns with the findings of Hausenblas (2002) and Kaye (2024) that athletes in sports where they are expected to look a certain way or where their coaches and teammates have physical expectations for them have increased body anxiety. The study revealed that different types of weight pressure are interrelated and that when one type of pressure is heightened, the other is also heightened. This was reflected in the data as different weight pressure factors exhibited strong positive relationships with each other. These findings are in line with previous studies that suggest that multiple sources of weight-related pressure can build up and contribute to greater body dissatisfaction and social physique anxiety. Findings of this study highlight the need to consider the interaction between weight pressure and social physique anxiety and its impact on body image, especially in team sports such as football. The study points to the need for sports organizations, coaches, and athletes to understand these pressures and look for ways to minimize the concerns and anxiety around body image to ensure mental health of athletes. Interventions may better address weight pressure and SPA to not only enhance the mental health of athletes, but their performance in sports as well.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the correlation among weight pressure, body image and social physique anxiety (SPA) among university football players. This study's findings indicate that there is a significant correlation between weight pressure and body image dissatisfaction, which means that the body image was negatively affected when football players experienced weight pressure and body standards to meet a certain weight. This is consistent with previous studies indicating that pressure in sports situations around weight is a factor of higher levels of body image dissatisfaction. In addition, social physique anxiety was identified as a key mediator in the association between weight pressure and body image. Additionally, players with high pressure from weight also showed high levels of SPA, which further increased their body dissatisfaction. This finding reinforces the hypothesis that SPA is a factor that plays an important role in the body image of athletes, especially when they are competing in a sport such as football. This study also confirmed that weight pressure has a direct impact on both body image and SPA in university football players. The cross-sectional design and self-reported data were limitations of the study, but it offered important insights into the influence of external pressures in sports contexts on psychological factors associated with body image. The results indicate that weight pressure reduction and SPA management interventions can contribute to enhancing athletes' psychological well-being and performance.

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