



Miles and Mindset: The Psychological Toll of Multi-Marathonning

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ABSTRACT

Multi-marathoners often complete hundreds of marathons. While endurance sports are linked to mental resilience, multi-marathonning may introduce psychological challenges, like depression and anxiety. This study explores these dimensions using established theoretical models, comparing multi-marathoners to general population norms and identify psychological subgroups. A cross-sectional online survey collected data from 576 multi-marathoners (56% men), mean age of 53.4 years (SD = 9.88) with average marathon completions of 146 (SD = 196.77). Depression and anxiety were assessed using the well-established instruments CESD-8 and STAI-S-6, and compared to TILDA, an Irish longitudinal ageing study. Age and gender trends were analysed with linear regression. Latent Class Analysis (LCA) identified subgroups, while t-tests and ANOVA explored group differences. Compared to TILDA norms, multi-marathoners had slightly higher depression and anxiety scores across demographics, though still below clinical thresholds (CESD-8 ≥ 8 ; STAI-S-6 ≥ 12). Women scored higher on depression than men. Older men had lower anxiety (slope = -0.35, $p = .002$), with a similar, non-significant trend in women. Depression scores were stable with minor, non-significant age-related shifts. LCA identified four psychological profiles, mostly with minimal to moderate symptoms. Notably, 8.0% of multi-marathoners fell into the Severe Depression & High Anxiety category, exceeding the highest clinical cut-offs. Multi-marathonning is not universally protective against depression or anxiety. While many exhibited low or subclinical symptoms, a subgroup showed clinically significant mental health issues. This highlights psychological variability and the limitations of group-level analysis, underscoring the need for targeted mental health assessments and individualised support.

Keywords: ageing; anxiety; depression; LCA; mental-health