Exploring the Experiences of Racial Trauma among Footballers

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Abstract

Background: The widespread and increasing number of reports of racism at all levels of football in the UK highlights the pervasiveness of the issue. Given the negative impact that racism has on mental health, it was crucial to explore footballers' experiences to identify areas where they could be better supported. Existing studies highlight a gap in research concentrating on how footballers experience and deal with racial trauma.

Method: Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the experiences of racial trauma among eight male semi-professional and professional footballers from ethnically diverse communities (EDCs). Participants were recruited for the study through purposive and snowball sampling.

Findings: The research was grounded in a critical realist epistemological perspective and employed a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) within the DSM-5 Framework. This analysis highlighted three key themes: racist events, psychological impact, and enhancing support and addressing racial trauma in footballers. Subsequently, eleven sub-themes emerged, revealing that racial trauma negatively impacts players' mental health, intensifying symptoms closely associated with PTSD.

Conclusion and Implications: The results were examined with existing research to assess their potential impact on football clubs, mental health services, and policies. The study also offers suggestions for further research and recommendations for supporting players who have experienced racial trauma.

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter Overview

This study examines how male professional and semi-professional footballers from ethnically diverse communities (EDCs) experience racial trauma as a result of racial abuse. The study further seeks to devise recommendations to improve support for players who have experienced these challenges. The first chapter discusses the researcher-participant relationship, defines key terms, and reflects on the epistemological position guiding the thesis. Next, the literature review examines the history of racism within sport, predominantly focusing on professional football. In addition, racial trauma theory is presented in the context of sport, and the rationale for treating racial trauma among footballers in clinical settings is explored. The chapter concludes by justifying the rationale for the systematic literature review.

Positioning the Researcher

Relationship with the Research Project

Acknowledging the role of the researcher within a study is critical as it influences research processes and outcomes (Gube, 2016). The researchers' experiences, views, and values can affect the direction of the study and the process of collecting data, which may introduce bias (Gube, 2016; Pinnegar & Quiles-Fernández, 2018). To mitigate bias in this research, I documented my thoughts and perspectives using the first-person narrative to uphold reflexivity and credibility (Harris, 2015; Pillow, 2003). According to Berger (2013), this approach helps the reader understand how knowledge is formed and interpreted. My reflections can be found in the epistemological and self-reflexivity sections of the paper. I used the third person to highlight participants' perspectives to ensure their stories were honoured without alteration and to maintain ethical research standards (Bondi, 2013).

My connection with this research stems from experiencing racism growing up in Brighton in the early 90s. I was part of the only black family in the area, and I experienced racism at school and in public places on a daily basis. Due to my black skin, I felt inferior, and this was exacerbated by authority figures doing little to make things better. As a result, from a young age, I learnt that racism was normal.

I also experienced racism during my playing career in football, which came as a surprise. This made me

less able to drop my guard in and around football spaces, making me feel anxious most of the time. Reflecting on those experiences now, I definitely would have benefitted from speaking to a mental health professional because it really got me down. Unfortunately, to my knowledge, there was no support like that, so I just got on with it.

These experiences affected how I saw myself on and off the field and made me feel like I did not belong in football and many other social spaces. Ultimately, this was one of the main reasons I did not continue to pursue a career in football. However, it motivated me to conduct a study in this area to tackle this issue. Furthermore, supporting individuals facing similar issues through psychological therapies has helped me heal from my past difficulties. I now feel more comfortable in my skin and have a better knowledge of the effects of racism. Conducting this study contributes to my goal of promoting racial equality in society by allowing football players to communicate their experiences of racism safely.

Epistemological Position

Epistemology examines the requirements for classifying something as knowledge (Pellegrino, 2021; Staller, 2012). It also involves validating how knowledge and truth are derived through research methods and dissemination (Pellegrino, 2021). Incorporating epistemology within qualitative research helps to produce more coherent and thorough research by giving context to the study. It also ensures that research procedures are critically examined using relevant theories (Hook, 2015).

It is also essential to consider ontology in research since it focuses on the nature of reality and existence (Maedche, 2002; Staller, 2012). Reflecting on ontology provides insights into individuals' diverse lived experiences and the subjectivity of their realities, enabling researchers to approach human experiences and meanings sensitively (Peck & Mummery, 2018). Subsequently, to ensure research credibility, the epistemology and ontological positions of the study must align to enable researchers to effectively tackle their pre-existing beliefs or biases (Bracken, 2010; Staller, 2012).

This study was guided by a critical realist perspective, which acknowledges that thoughts and assumptions exist independently of the individual's external reality (Cruickshank, 2002). Adopting this stance accepts that reality is constructed through lived experiences and social environments (Cruickshank, 2002).

Thus, this framework provides qualitative researchers with an understanding of the link between lived experiences and the social context (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Willig, 2019).

This makes critical realism fitting for the current study since it allows the researcher to look into structural dynamics within football, such as institutional racism and power, that may perpetuate racial trauma in players (Bhaskar, 2013). Critical realism may also be useful in understanding how microaggressions, prejudice, and stereotypes affect players' mental health to inform positive change (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007).

Self-reflexivity

Reflexivity is a key qualitative research component, emphasising the researcher's self-awareness and commitment to objective outcomes (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). It requires the researcher to show awareness of the impact of their positionality, attitudes, and prejudices on the study (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). This involves thoroughly examining how their identities, social connections, and views pervade different phases of research (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). Reflexivity also involves researchers being transparent about their methodological procedures and maintaining continuous internal dialogue regarding the possible influence of their biases on the study (Finlay, 2002; Olmos-Vega et al., 2022).

My Nigerian heritage and experience of racial discrimination while playing semi-professional football in England influenced my position as an insider researcher. This allowed me to relate to participants personally and culturally, enhancing the depth and authenticity of the collected data (Chavez-Reyes, 2015; Saidin, 2016). The literature suggests that researchers with similar backgrounds or experiences with their participants often engage in more open and honest discourses (McDermid et al., 2014; Muasya, 2023; Rodriguez, 2010). This is because they can cultivate safe spaces where participants are less likely to avoid speaking about sensitive issues because they fear being misjudged or misunderstood (Mohammadi et al., 2008).

On the other hand, insider researchers must not presume that their experiences are the same as study participants until they are adequately explored and explained in their research (Ross, 2017). This assumption can lead to an underexplored or superficial analysis and research lacking diverse perspectives (Ross, 2017). In other circumstances, this can result in confirmation bias, where the researcher unconsciously favours participant narratives that support their beliefs (Probst, 2016).

Being an insider researcher also facilitates recruitment procedures since potential participants are more likely to interact with someone they know and trust (Welch & Patton, 1992). This trust reduces initial relational barriers that an outsider researcher might encounter (Burkett & Morris, 2015; De Tona, 2006). This status and my existing friendships with footballers gave me access to gatekeepers who facilitated introductions and rapport-building with other potential recruits (Aburn et al., 2021; Muasya, 2023). These gatekeepers further supported recruitment by endorsing the importance of the study and my reputation (Aburn et al., 2021; Muasya, 2023).

Despite the advantages of having insider status, researchers may unintentionally influence different aspects of the study, which may impact its authenticity (Saidin, 2016). As a result, scholars suggest that researchers engage in different methods of self-reflexivity throughout the research process to maintain research integrity (Hook, 2015; Luttrell, 2019). Therefore, I kept a reflexive diary to reduce the influence of my biases on the study, which allowed me to assess my beliefs, prejudices, and feelings (Ortlipp, 2015). Furthermore, I attended regular supervision, which facilitated critical discussions and ensured I maintained ethical research standards (Muthanna & Alduais, 2020).

I also used a bracketing interview to minimise the impact of my assumptions on the study (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). This approach challenges researchers to step away from their assumptions, which enables more lucid interpretations of participants' experiences (Gearing, 2004; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The bracketing interview took place before data collection and involved answering questions about the study (Gearing, 2004). I documented my insights in my reflexive diary during and after the interview so that I could reflect on them throughout the research process, which increased my awareness of my biases (Beech, 1999; Gearing, 2004).

Despite trying to adhere to bracketing guidelines (Beech, 1999; Gearing, 2004; Starks & Trinidad, 2007), the more I attempted to separate myself from my assumptions, the more evident they became. Such reflective scrutiny is a cornerstone of the critical realist approach, which recognises our propensity for fallible interpretations (Willig, 2019). My experience of this process was echoed by Gearing's (2004) observations about the difficulty researchers encounter when trying to extract their personal biases from their analysis, bringing into question the level of my actual impartiality. Nonetheless, I persevered with the guidelines to

enhance the integrity of my research.

Language and Context

This section highlights how language was used and outlines the context of the study. Language is important because it is a way to collect, report, and discuss information in qualitative studies (Polkinghorne, 2005). Moreover, it is pivotal to constructing subjective realities and maintaining existing power structures and ideological views in society (Gage et al., 1980). This can mean perpetuating and justifying unequal and oppressive practices (Collins, 2018). Historically, this has exposed EDCs to language and communication that is oppressive and discriminatory (Torres-Rivera et al., 2008). Given that the primary objective of the study is to challenge marginalisation based on race and promote positive change, the thesis prioritises using culturally sensitive language that respects participants' identities while avoiding language that reinforces oppression. Furthermore, this paper will also contextualise the study within geographical locations and sociocultural and political conditions, which will help to make sense of participants' experiences of racial trauma within football (Ribeiro et al., 2021).

Definition of Key Terms

Racism. This occurs when certain racial groups are perceived to be superior to others (Berg, 1996; Grosfoguel, 2016; Smith, 2020). Racial groups considered inferior are denied human rights, resources, and social acknowledgement (Berg, 1996; Fanon, 1952; Grosfoguel, 2016; Smith, 2020). The definition of racism extends beyond skin colour, as racial hierarchies can also be based on factors like language, ethnicity, culture, and religion influenced by contextual conditions (Grosfoguel, 2016). According to Jones (2000), racism is demonstrated in society through institutionalised practices that deny people opportunities and resources based on their skin colour. It can also be personally mediated through deliberate or unintentional acts of discrimination or linked to colourism through internalised acceptance of negative racial stereotypes.

Racism may be overt, which involves blatant acts of discrimination against people based on their race, such as verbal abuse or physical assault (Sue et al., 2007). In contrast, racism may be subtle and include indirect forms of discrimination, microaggressions or implicit biases, which lead to racial stereotypes and inequality being reinforced (Fisher et al., 2017). Lastly, institutional policies and practices that are harmful or exclude

certain racial groups are referred to as systemic racism (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

Race and Ethnicity. Race classifies people into categories using physical traits such as skin tone and facial structure, and similar to ethnicity, it is understood as a societal creation rather than a result of biological specificity (Roomi et al., 2011; Shaul et al., 2005). However, Van Sterkenburg et al. (2019) assert that ethnicity encompasses traditions, language, and values. Critics have pointed out discrepancies in how these terms are used in research and colloquial conversations, leading to a loss of their original meanings (Van Sterkenburg et al., 2019). Despite the differences between race and ethnicity, this thesis will use the words interchangeably to adhere to current literature and cultural conventions.

Racial Trauma. A branch of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) refers to the psychological difficulties caused by encountering racial violence or discrimination. This may be triggered as a consequence of direct encounters or witnessing racially motivated violence or prejudice. As with PTSD, those struggling with this condition may exhibit negative effects on their psychological, emotional, and physical health (Metzger et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2018).

Ethnically Diverse Communities (EDCs). Sporting Equals, the leading organisation on increasing ethnic diversity in sport, has produced sector guidance on language and terminology. They propose that terms like ‘minority ethnic group,’ BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic), and BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) should be avoided because they oversimplify distinct cultural experiences and perpetuate reductive stereotypes (Lawrence et al., 2024; Sporting Equals, 2021). These terms combine race, locality, and nationality but remove crucial aspects of identity, which may be exclusionary (Sporting Equals, 2021). Furthermore, these descriptions frequently apply to individuals who are not white, omitting white ethnic groups that may experience similar inequalities (Lawrence et al., 2024).

Additionally, Sporting Equals encourages using specific racial identifiers whenever possible because they allow individuals to feel more respected (Sporting Equals, 2021). This specificity recognises the diversity of cultural experiences within and between different communities, enabling more effective action to address injustice. Furthermore, they suggested using ‘EDCs’ as an umbrella term to describe individuals who experience inequality and discrimination due to their ethnicity. Utilising this term recognises the value of

individual communities' unique cultural, social, and historical roots.

It is also consistent with Critical Race Theory, which argues for enabling people from diverse cultural groups to determine their own identities and experiences, which can facilitate more effective diversity and inclusion policies (Guinier & Torres, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Lawrence et al., 2024). As this research sought voices from different racial backgrounds, using specific racial identifiers when discussing their collective voices was impractical. As a result, this thesis will employ the term 'EDC' alongside specific racial identifiers whenever possible in order to create a more nuanced and respectful depiction of multiple identities.

Sport. An organised and competitive activity requiring physical exertion and/or skill that follows a set of rules and is widely recognised as a sport (Eime et al., 2020).

Professional and Semi-professional Footballers. Male Professional footballers often command high salaries, are highly skilled, and play in the best competitions. However, semi-professionals play in lower-profile competitions that attract less attention and lower income, both in salaries and sponsorship opportunities (Jobs in Football, 2023). Professional footballers in England typically participate in the top four tiers of football, whereas semi-professional players compete between the fifth and eighth tiers (Goodacre & Goodacre, 2023).

Background Literature

This section outlines the available literature on racial trauma in sports, focusing exclusively on football. It explores the historical context of racism in sports and football in the UK and considers how past racism affects modern sports. Subsequent parts examine the connections between racial trauma and football, as well as its importance to clinical settings. The section concludes by giving a rationale for the systematic literature review on racial trauma in sports.

Racism and Sport

The development of racial categories and the belief that some racial groups are inferior to others are linked to slavery (Guthrie, 2004), a time when Europeans seized control over territories and oppressed indigenous people due to their belief in the superiority of white skin (Inwood, 2015). Although a historical understanding is necessary, racism in current society needs to be considered more broadly than its historical roots, as it manifests in everyday communication, activities, and institutional functions (Salter et al., 2017). For

example, Combs (2019) contends that these historical beliefs about black skin persist in society today, supporting the notion that black people are outsiders. This leads to behaviours that reinforce racism and maintain white domination (Combs, 2019). The absence of effective action taken against people who perpetrate racist behaviours within institutions leads to wider systems of oppression going unchecked (Combs, 2019).

Sports are profoundly established in societal systems and have enormous worldwide relevance, but they are not immune to the widespread racism that impacts many aspects of life (Ungur et al., 2018). Sports environments mirror the larger society, exhibiting the same biases and discriminatory practices that are prevalent in everyday life (Khakhalkina & Munko, 2022; Singer et al., 2022; Sousa et al., 2022). This is emphasised by the overt racism that EDCs experienced as they emigrated to the UK in both society and sports (Ungur et al., 2018). Athletes from EDCs faced racial slurs during games and rejection from organisations based on their race (Cashmore & Cleland, 2011; Garland & Rowe, 2001; Long et al., 2005).

Athletes also experienced subtle racism through microaggressions and biased commentating (Campbell, 2021; Misener et al., 2018; UK Sport, 2021). For example, black footballers in the UK faced subtle racial discrimination through negative stereotypes, which highlighted their physical attributes over their intellectual and strategic capabilities (Campbell, 2021; Misener et al., 2018; UK Sport, 2021). Even though these covert forms of racism are less obvious, they are still harmful because they perpetuate structural injustices and stereotypes in football (Sue et al., 2007).

The lack of employment opportunities for EDC coaches is an example of how systemic racism plays out in the football industry. Bradbury et al. (2018) examined the obstacles that limit employment opportunities for male coaches' from EDCs in professional football and found that they were disproportionately disadvantaged by the high costs of coaching courses, which limit their access to training. This makes it difficult for EDC coaches to progress in their careers. Similar to other sectors, football coaching recruitment also strongly favours networking over qualifications, which disadvantages EDC coaches, who often do not have access to the same professional networks as white coaches (Bradbury et al., 2018).

Networking often results in maintaining the status quo, making it harder for individuals from EDCs to access these roles (Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988). This deeply embedded practice upholds hegemonic white

norms within the sport's power structure, perpetuating racial disparities and limiting the professional growth of EDC coaches (Bradbury et al., 2018). Therefore, to better comprehend the current instances of racism in sport, it is crucial to examine the history of racism, with a particular focus on sport in the UK.

History of Racism in the UK Sports Sector

It is important to investigate the historical background of racism in UK sports to illuminate recurring patterns of discrimination and exclusion that can lead to racial trauma. This historical background helps to contextualise the issues that athletes face today. Codified sport, as we would recognise it today, started to develop in the late 19th century (Askwith, 1998). Athletes of African and Caribbean descent have been disproportionately affected by prejudice ever since (Askwith, 1998). Pioneers in British football, including Arthur Wharton, endured racial taunts while breaking down boundaries between 1889 and 1951 (Askwith, 1998). In addition, football players like John Parris and Jack Leslie faced animosity, proving that racial discrimination was pervasive among opponents and fans (Markus & Fryer, 1985).

During this time, only a few black athletes were prominent in sports. However, Randolph Turpin's triumph as world middleweight champion helped to transcend common racial preconceptions (Johnes & Taylor, 2020). His accomplishments changed the discourse on racial prejudice by bringing attention to the skills of black athletes in sports traditionally dominated by white athletes (Johnes & Taylor, 2020).

Despite this, racial stereotyping in sports had been entrenched long before Turpin's era, as demonstrated by theories from the early 20th century, which regularly portrayed black athletes as physically gifted but lacking intelligence and strategic abilities (Hoberman, 1997). Turpin proved that black athletes could succeed in challenging, high-skill sports, which helped to dispel some of the damaging racial stereotypes and create a more nuanced understanding of athletic ability across racial lines (Johnes & Taylor, 2020).

In addition, Turpin’s acclaim as a national hero despite his racial background marked a change in public perceptions towards a more inclusive recognition of talent and accomplishment (Johnes & Taylor, 2020). However, his success had a limited impact on reducing racism in sport because of the underlying presence of social prejudice, which continually undermined efforts to reduce racial inequalities (Johnes & Taylor, 2020).

Overt racial discrimination in UK sport continued between 1951 and 1971, despite the post-war

migration bringing in many non-British-born black and Asian players to the UK from the Commonwealth (Ismond, 2003; Vasili, 1998). Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech and Peter Griffiths' election victory were prime examples of the social tensions around immigration and race during this time (Ben-Tovim & Gabriel, 1982; Brown, 2018).

A significant amount of racism occurred in football as more players from EDCs began entering the sport (Trehan, 2018). Footballers like Viv Anderson and Clive Sullivan experienced persistent racist abuse during games from this time into the 1990s (Brinkhurst-Cuff, 2023). As a consequence, anti-discrimination campaigns such as 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' were launched to eliminate racism from the sport (Cashmore, 2012; Garland & Rowe, 2001; Jones, 2002). The next section delves deeper into the history of racism in English football.

History of Racism in English football

This section delves deeper into the obstacles and conventional views that Arthur Wharton encountered from the 1800s to the early 1900s (Jenkins, 1990; Vasili, 1998). Wharton, the first black professional in Britain, faced major challenges in gaining recognition and respect in the sport despite his exceptional physical abilities (Jenkins, 1990; Vasili, 1998). His experiences within football and the media reflected the racial biases prevalent in society at the time, such as unfair selection methods and disparaging language in the press that reinforced racial stereotypes (Jenkins, 1990; Vasili, 1998).

Scholars document Wharton’s experience of systemic racism, which excluded him from several opportunities to progress in his football career (Jenkins, 1990; Vasili, 1998). This was similar to the barriers that black people faced through restrictions in employment, education, and housing, reflecting the entrenched institutional racism (Vasili, 1998). Following the Second World War, football grew increasingly racially diverse. However, this did not improve the treatment of players from EDCs, and racism continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Hamilton, 1982).

The likes of Cyrille Regis, Laurie Cunningham, and Brendon Batson challenged racism in football, which led to reforms in policies and beliefs (Cashmore, 2012; Holland, 1997). Changes included extending the Rooney Rule to the UK, which required clubs to interview candidates from EDCs for senior coaching positions

(Kilvington, 2018). Moreover, the combined effort of these players contributed to the development of programs like the Kick It Out campaign, which was started to combat racism and prejudice in football (Sports Journalists' Association, 2010).

They disproved the stereotype that black athletes were less talented by performing well on the pitch and proved that black players could compete at the highest levels of football (Shaw, 2018; Sports Journalists' Association, 2010). Their performance helped pave the way for future generations of black footballers (Shaw, 2018; Sports Journalists' Association, 2010). Despite their actions, they continued to face prejudice from fans, opposition players, and the press (Cashmore, 2013; Holland, 1997). These historical narratives highlight the deep-rooted racial difficulties in UK football and set the stage for the following section, which investigates how these entrenched prejudices continue to impact football today.

Impact of Historical Racism on Modern Football Culture

There are strong links between historical racism and contemporary football in the UK, which is shown by modern forms of overt and institutional racism that make football environments difficult for EDC players (Aarons, 2023; Gillett, 2021; Kassimeris et al., 2022; Sloop, 2023). As previously mentioned, there has been a history of overt racist abuse directed at football players in the UK from various sources (Back & Mills, 2021). According to current industry data, discrimination rose by 65% in the 2022–2023 season, demonstrating that racism is still a considerable problem (Kick It Out, 2024).

Furthermore, there has historically been a problem with overt racism within football stadiums (Garland & Rowe, 2001). Racist chants were heard constantly throughout the 1970s and 1980s, targeting black players and supporters (Back et al., 2001). These chants captured the hatred and marginalisation that individuals from EDCs in the UK experienced in sport and within general society (Gilroy, 2013). According to Cashmore and Cleland (2011), overt racism in football stadiums produced a hostile climate that marginalised black players and encouraged racist views among the wider public.

This historical context of overt racism in football grounds has been linked with the online abuse faced by players such as Jadon Sancho, Marcus Rashford, and Bukayo Saka (Back & Mills, 2021; Gillett, 2021). This suggests very little has changed concerning how black males are viewed within football (Back & Mills, 2021;

Gillett, 2021). These experiences can be viewed as direct successors of historical racial maltreatment, indicating deeply ingrained racial biases that persist in both contemporary and traditional modes of expression (Cleland & Cashmore, 2013; Holland, 1997).

Historically, black football players faced significant racism both on and off the field despite their talent and contributions to the sport (Cashmore, 2013). This demonstrates the extent to which their acceptance was conditional (Cashmore, 2013). The persistence of this problem is highlighted by the barrage of racist comments on social media experienced by three young black players after they missed penalties at the Euro 2020 final (Back & Mills, 2021; Gillett, 2021). This revealed that black players could initially be celebrated when things were going well. However, this can quickly become racial abuse when they fail to meet fans' expectations, showing that acceptance remains performance-based and contingent upon continuous success (Back & Mills, 2021; Gillett, 2021).

A significant portion of the racial abuse aimed at the three England players during the men's Euros occurred online, reflecting the changing character of racism in modern culture (Gillett, 2021). This transformation has made racist conduct appear more concealed and vicious since the broad spread of the internet offers abusers a large pool of athletes to reach out and harass while remaining anonymous (Sloop, 2023). This trend worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, when fans were not allowed to attend games, work, or engage in social activities (Caselli et al., 2023). Due to government restrictions, fans had more opportunities to harass footballers online, which led to a rise in reports of abuse by players (Kassimeris et al., 2022). Kick It Out findings reveal that online racism against players has got worse over time, with a 279% increase in racism during the 2022–23 season (Kick It Out, 2024). This increase underscores how digital platforms have become new venues for racial abuse (Kassimeris et al., 2022; Kick It Out, 2024).

Finally, Aarons's (2023) findings demonstrate that people from EDCs are still being overlooked for senior and leadership positions in sports. Their research noted a marginal 0.7% rise in the recruitment of black managers, indicating that systematic racism remains a problem in the sport. The literature demonstrates that the history of racism strongly influences modern football culture and requires effective intervention to address how it has changed over time (Cleland & Cashmore, 2013). The next section will analyse measures the UK

government and football organisations have undertaken to tackle racism in football.

Initiatives to Tackle Racism in Football

The Premier League, the Football Association (FA), and other football groups have taken many steps to eradicate racism. The Premier League's No Room for Racism plan strives to promote diversity in leadership roles, strengthen coaching, and help communities through educational programs (Premier League, 2021). However, the lack of progress in employing individuals from EDCs for these roles has suggested it has been ineffective thus far (Aarons, 2023). The project upholds strong anti-racism policies while encouraging inclusivity and equality in football at all levels (Premier League, 2021). However, there is still work to be done to implement these ideas into effective changes to club procedures and supporter behaviour (Premier League, 2021). According to research, long-term cultural improvements inside organisations are often more beneficial than instant ones (Shepherd et al., 2019).

Similarly, the FA and other associations collaborated to reinforce anti-racism messaging and take immediate action against prejudice by using the "Black Lives Matter" logo on shirts during matches (The Football Association, 2020a). In addition, they supported players who chose to take the knee, symbolising solidarity against racial injustice (The Football Association, 2020a). However, players continued to face harassment in games and on social media, which suggested that these efforts were ineffective (The Football Association, 2019). This cynicism is supported by research, which shows that although actions such as taking a knee raise awareness, they often have little impact on institutional procedures or cultural attitudes (Zirin, 2022). For instance, the prominence of the gesture during crucial sporting fixtures prompted discussions and drew attention to racial inequality concerns, but its influence was limited in the absence of corresponding structural reforms (McDonnell, 2022).

Following the UK government's continued attempts to combat online prejudice, legislation was approved to charge social media firms for ignoring racism on their platforms (Street, 2021). Additionally, fans convicted of racism online were prohibited from attending football matches (Street, 2021). These sanctions highlighted an improved understanding of the impact of racial abuse online and the government's commitment to supporting anti-racist practices in sport (Kassimeris et al., 2022; Street, 2021). Despite the government’s

approach, online racial abuse has increased, with many incidents going unreported or not leading to adequate legal repercussions, which raises doubt about the effectiveness of these legal measures (Kassimeris et al., 2022; The Football Association, 2020b; Street, 2021).

Impact of Racism on Athletes' Mental Health

Athletes' mental health is significantly impacted by racism, which can influence their physical health, psychological well-being, and performance (Schouler-Ocak & Moran, 2022; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). Student-athlete studies have shown that racism may cause them to feel extremely distressed, which can exacerbate psychological issues and decrease their willingness to seek psychological treatment (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020; Kroshus et al., 2023). In some athletes, this can cause chronic mental health issues such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019).

Moreover, experiences of racism may impair athletes' ability to recover from injuries and achieve their personal performance goals (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). In high-stress situations like competitive sports, where both physical and mental health are necessary for peak performance, the combined impact on physical and mental health can be particularly harmful (Schouler-Ocak & Moran, 2022; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000).

Subtle racism can also impact athletes' mental health and may manifest as a lack of opportunity for leadership or decision-making roles, leaving EDC players feeling isolated and disillusioned (Singer, 2005). Furthermore, cultural racism perpetuates stereotypes and produces unsupportive environments for athletes from diverse communities (Rhys, 2024; Bennett & King, 2021). Such discrimination affects athletes' career prospects and self-esteem (Rhys, 2024; Bennett & King, 2021).

While these studies provide important information on the relationship between systemic racism and athlete mental health, they do not fully examine the nuanced experiences of racial trauma (Begel, 2023; Kroshus et al., 2023). Therefore, further research is needed to establish the foundation for improved assistance for athletes who encounter these challenges (Liu & Modir, 2020). In light of this, the next section will provide a theoretical framework for understanding how athletes may encounter racial trauma. A theoretical framework for understanding racial trauma gives mental health professionals a structured way of recognising and treating the

negative effects of racism on mental health (Williams et al., 2018).

Theoretical Framework for Understanding Racial Trauma in Athletes

The Racial Trauma and PTSD in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-5) Framework enable experiences of racism among athletes to be effectively understood. The framework suggests there is a linear structure of experiencing a racist event and having a traumatic reaction. It then posits that four psychological responses from this reaction may occur: re-experiencing intrusion, avoidance, negative mood and cognitions, and physiological arousal (see Figure 1). This framework has been applied in both clinical and research contexts. Mental health professionals have used this paradigm to help them assess and treat racial trauma in EDCs (Williams et al., 2018, 2023). Moreover, it has been employed in research to facilitate the development of other racial discrimination frameworks, such as the Oppression-Based Traumatic Stress Inventory (Holmes et al., 2023).

According to the model, racial trauma can increase an athlete's general sense of danger, anger, and fear, which may worsen if these feelings are met with invalidation or insufficient space to process them (Williams et al., 2018). Individuals with such problems may develop chronic symptoms of re-experiencing, avoidance behaviours and increased arousal (Williams et al., 2018). Moreover, some people may have biological markers that make them more vulnerable to the effects of past traumas or ongoing racial oppression, which predisposes them to racial trauma (Williams et al., 2018). Persistent encounters with racism can heighten an individual’s baseline stress level due to these risk factors (Williams et al., 2018).

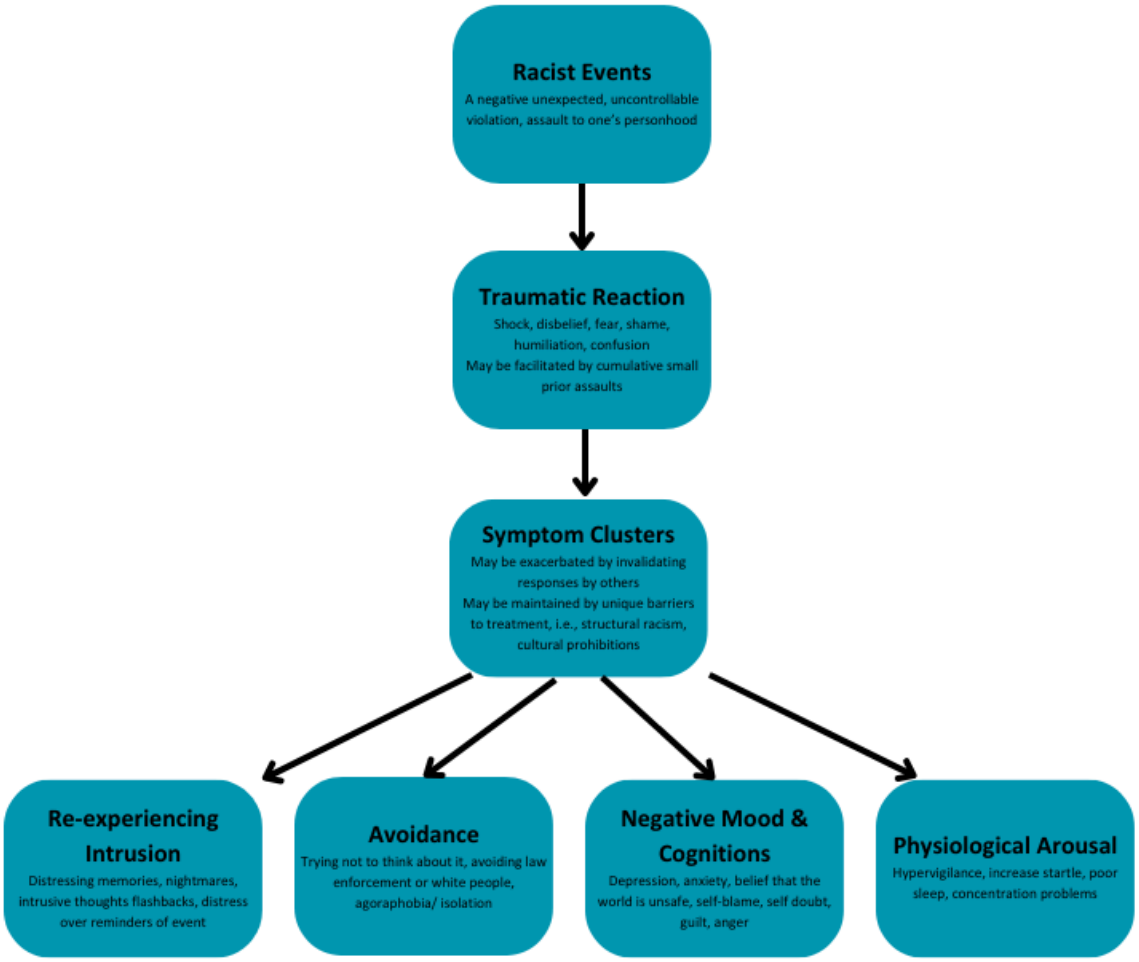
The model provides several useful insights for understanding how racial trauma impacts the mental health of athletes. This includes recognising the intersectionality of race and sports and acknowledging that athletes from EDCs experience distinct forms of discrimination and microaggressions (Williams et al., 2018). This model also shows how challenging it can be for athletes to navigate this problem while trying to maintain high performance levels. Additionally, it validates athletes’ emotions and explains why some may struggle to meet their sporting goals (Williams et al., 2018). Lastly, from a systemic perspective, it gives a deeper understanding of the organisational inequalities and power imbalances that perpetuate racism against athletes from EDCs (Williams et al., 2018).

Despite this framework's strengths, the measure devised to assess racial trauma has not been used specifically within sporting contexts (Williams et al., 2018). This poses a challenge to integrating the framework within the sports industry, where institutional barriers such as disproportionate EDC representation in leadership roles (Bradbury et al., 2018), systemic racism in recruiting (Cashmore & Cleland, 2011), and inadequate anti-racism policies make it challenging to address racism effectively (Cleland & Cashmore, 2013). This can hinder effective assessment and support for athletes dealing with racial trauma (Williams et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, because of its thorough and structured design, this thesis uses the DSM-5 framework to understand racial trauma in sport (see Figure 1). Through the lens of this paradigm, the research seeks to provide a more profound understanding of athletes' experiences by methodically analysing the traumatising impacts of racism.

Figure 1

Racial Trauma and PTSD in the DSM-5



The Rationale for a Football Focus

Having discussed the theoretical framework to explain racial trauma in athletes, it is critical to investigate how these ideas relate to football, as the sport significantly impacts cultural norms and conduct in the UK (The Football Association, 2019). Football's extensive societal influence is demonstrated by its physical health benefits, including significant social advantages such as lowering engagement in the criminal justice system and enhancing educational outcomes (Campelli, 2021). In addition, football's ability to promote cultural integration influences community norms and values, which increases the sense of belonging for individuals in EDCs (Taylor et al., 2014).

The 11.8 million adults in England who actively participate in football (e.g., playing, officiating, and

volunteering) in some capacity highlight the reach of football just in this country alone (The Football Association, n.d.). This figure rises even further when supporters are considered (The Football Association, 2019). As a result, racial trauma in football can affect players, fans, and larger communities, and therefore, increased incidents may cause significant strain on public health services (Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Riina et al., 2012; The Football Association, 2019). The visibility and the impact that the sport has on large groups of people make it an ideal sport for addressing racial trauma (Kassimeris et al., 2022).

Moreover, football clubs usually have close connections with local communities and often have a range of social responsibilities that they fulfil (Kassimeris et al., 2022). This allows them to use their community ties to promote diversity and anti-racism initiatives that influence the norms and behaviours of the people they serve (Kassimeris et al., 2022). This is demonstrated in Everton Football Club's health initiative, which improved health awareness and community engagement (Curran et al., 2016; Henderson et al., 2014). This indicates that football is an ideal setting for investigating racial trauma due to its widespread exposure, societal influence, and economic position (Kassimeris et al., 2022). The relationship between football and racial trauma is examined in the next section.

The Intersection of Racial Trauma and Football

There is a substantial body of research on racial trauma, particularly in psychiatry and social sciences, although it is less understood how it applies to sport. Understanding it in the context of football in the UK is necessary because of the sport's high public interest (Kassimeris et al., 2022; Richardson, 2022). In addition, EDC footballers are increasingly vulnerable to being racially abused because of the intense performance pressures associated with the sport (Kassimeris et al., 2022; Richardson, 2022). This exposure significantly increases their risk of developing racial trauma, particularly when compounded by other specific football-related stressors (Bennett, 2021). The high incidents of racism experienced by footballers during matches and on social media platforms underline how susceptible they may be to developing racial trauma (Back & Mills, 2021; Gillett, 2021; Kassimeris et al., 2022). According to Williams et al. (2018), such encounters can lead to mental health disorders, including PTSD, characterised by heightened anxiety, avoidance and hypervigilance.

Although existing studies provide an understanding of the harmful impact of racism on the well-being of football players' (Back & Mills, 2021; Gillett, 2021; Kassimeris et al., 2022), they rely on quantitative approaches and the short-term impacts of racial abuse (Bennett, 2021). While these studies provide valued insights into the prevalence and patterns of abuse, they often do not explore the lived experiences and deeper meanings given to racially traumatic events. Subsequently, it prioritises a focus on the biological indicators of distress rather than looking at aspects that might have caused the underlying mental health issues (Bennett, 2021). This highlights the need for research to focus on qualitative methods to explore footballers' experiences to better understand the effects of racial trauma (Bennett, 2021). Given these methodological limitations, it is important to consider research from different sports and international settings that explores racial trauma beyond immediate emotional responses (Bennett, 2021).

Relevance of Racial Trauma in Footballers to Clinical Settings

Football is an important environment for focusing on racial trauma due to its popularity across all tiers of football and broad appeal to various demographic groups (The Football Association, 2020b). However, racism is particularly pervasive at grassroots level, where it accounts for over 60% of documented discrimination incidents among young people (O'Neill & Reidy, 2024). This demonstrates that football is an important setting for the occurrence of racially traumatic events, even at a local level.

As a result, clinical psychologists play a crucial role in public health services by creating specialist assessments and treatments tailored to EDC football players' requirements (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2018). Furthermore, their input would also exceed the stress management strategies that athletes receive from sports psychologists, which may help improve performance but are unlikely to effectively reduce racial trauma symptoms (Andersen, 2009; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Hanton et al., 2009). Clinical psychologists are trained to provide evidence-based interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which could help to reduce the negative effects of racism (Pieterse, 2018). For example, learning cognitive restructuring and mindfulness techniques may be helpful in lowering stress and enhancing emotional regulation, helping players maintain concentration on the pitch despite challenges posed by racial trauma (Ericksen et al., 2022).

Supporting those who have experienced racially traumatic incidents also involves developing therapies

that are culturally and contextually informed, which clinical psychologists are trained to provide (Frisby et al., 2018). This makes these professionals more suited to support EDC footballers than sports psychologists, who are unlikely to have the specialist knowledge to provide interventions for racial trauma (Andersen, 2009; Schinke et al., 2017).

Clinical psychologists also receive regular supervision where they are encouraged to reflect on different aspects of racial trauma to enhance the care provided (Pieterse, 2018). This can help to address factors that may hinder treatment, such as clinicians' discomfort about initiating conversations about race during therapy (Williams et al., 2018). This makes their contribution to this field vital for achieving the NHS's public health goals of providing preventative care and reducing health inequalities (NHS England, 2019.; Wright et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This literature review identifies the difficulties EDC athletes experience navigating sports environments due to racism from an empirical and theoretically informed perspective. It highlights that current research tends to overlook the nuanced experiences of athletes who face racial trauma by typically focusing on biological indicators of distress and immediate emotional reactions. There is a lack of research that explores how athletes understand and deal with racism in sports settings. This oversight identifies a research gap that could significantly contribute to public health goals to improve health equity and inclusion within sports environments. The next chapter presents a mixed-methods systematic literature review of the available research on racial trauma in athletes to better understand their experiences of racial trauma and identify existing literature gaps that might guide and shape future research.

Chapter Two: Systematic Literature Review

Chapter Overview

A systematic literature review (SLR) aims to encompass the intricate and dynamic landscape of research, where studies may present supporting or contradictory findings that contribute to creating fresh knowledge and understanding (Siddaway et al., 2019). SLRs also draw attention to areas lacking knowledge and offer suggestions for improving clinical practice and guiding future research endeavours (Fink, 2005).

An initial scoping search was undertaken using relevant databases (e.g., PubMed) to gain an in-depth understanding of the research landscape before committing to a full SLR (Damarell et al., 2018). This highlighted several studies that showed a link between experiencing racism and mental health issues (Schouler-Ocak & Moran, 2021; Williams & Mohammed, 2013). However, it also revealed a gap in understanding the impact of racial trauma on athletes, with a limited focus on studies exploring athletes' experiences of racism (Paradies et al., 2015). The impact of racial trauma carries importance to athletes and the global economy, as racism is influential in sport and is a microcosm of society (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019).

Therefore, the SLR findings can provide helpful insights into the consequences of racial trauma in highly competitive sports settings and provide knowledge that improves public health policies and mental health interventions globally (Cénat, 2022; Polanco-Roman et al., 2016). Thus, this SLR attempted to address this research gap and add to the existing body of literature on racism in athletes, which may benefit athletes and the wider society.

The SLR will synthesise relevant empirical studies and draw conclusions from the impact of racial trauma on athletes. The research question is: 'What are the experiences of racial trauma among athletes?' This SLR has been verified for originality and registered on the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (reg no. CRD42023483760).

Method

This mixed-method SLR used a thematic synthesis to extract data qualitatively from multiple studies to draw key themes and develop new interpretive constructs (Anderson et al., 2015; Cruzes & Dybå, 2011; Gabel & Robb, 2017; Thomas & Harden, 2008). The approach is a modified method of 'thematic analysis (TA)'

developed for synthesising secondary data and offering established techniques to develop analytical themes in primary research data (Thomas & Harden, 2008). This approach aligned with addressing the research question by aggregating evidence and establishing patterns (Booth et al., 2016). Although it is most suited to combining outcomes from qualitative studies, it is also employed for synthesising the results of quantitative studies, especially where variables and measurement outcomes are heterogeneous (Booth et al., 2016). Employing this method provided a deeper understanding of how the outcomes in the different studies relate to each other. Lastly, thematic synthesis supports transparency and accessibility of findings, aligning with a critical realist stance of methodological pluralism and epistemic relativism (Proudfoot, 2022).

Definition of Key Terms

Sport. Organised and competitive activity requiring physical exertion and/or skill that follows a set of rules and is widely recognised as a sport (Eime et al., 2020).

Mental Health. The psychological, emotional, and social factors that impact how people think, feel, and behave (World Health Organisation, 2022).

Racism. The mistreatment of others based on their skin colour (Berg, 1996; Grosfoguel, 2016; Smith, 2020).

Selection Criteria

The literature searches were not constrained to a specific timeframe, as it is recommended that the identification of studies in under-researched areas, such as racial trauma in sport, be contingent upon the availability of relevant literature (Jones et al., 2013). This approach broadened the opportunity to find relevant studies. The review also refrained from limiting experiences of racism to a particular racial group, sport, or age range to ensure the search was comprehensive. The inclusion and exclusion criteria of the SLR are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

SLR Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
The study must include empirical data from individuals engaged in amateur, semi-professional, or professional sport.	The study focuses on individuals engaged in physical activity/exercise.
The study must include specific data related to racial trauma (i.e., the psychological and emotional impact of exposure to racism and discrimination).	Studies without specific data about racial trauma.
The study must contain qualitative or quantitative empirical data.	Articles without empirical data.
The study must be a peer-reviewed published article written in English and have empirical data.	The study is a non-peer-reviewed article written in a language other than English.

Search Strategy

Full database searches were conducted between May and June 2023 and involved five electronic databases (CINAHL Plus, EBSCO, Google Scholar, PubMed, and Scopus). These databases were selected to obtain literature from disciplines such as sports psychology, social sciences, and health sciences (Gough et al., 2017). Email alerts were also set up to facilitate a comprehensive search process, ensuring that relevant studies were included up to the analysis stage. The search strategy was initiated using the database's thesaurus function and conducting several pilot searches to identify relevant studies' most frequently used terms. Further terms were produced through discussions with the wider research team.

Finding relevant literature was enriched by following an evidence-based systematic review-specific search tool, which is useful in formulating research questions and guiding systematic literature searches (Cooke et al., 2012; Schardt et al., 2007). The SPIDER framework (Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, and Research Type) was selected because it is tailored to accommodate the intricacies and richness of data, allowing for the exploration of qualitative, quantitative and mixed-method studies (Cooke et al., 2012; Methley et al., 2014). This approach is informed by outlining components of the research inquiry through the PICO framework, which plays a crucial role in ensuring that the SPIDER framework adequately tackles the intricacies of the subject matter (Schardt et al., 2007). The structure of PICO aids the identification of specific

aspects, such as the target population, intervention methods, comparative analysis, and expected outcomes, which shape aspects within the SPIDER framework (Cooke et al., 2012). This cohesive approach ensures that searches methodically encompass a range of viewpoints and approaches for understanding topics like racial trauma in athletes (Cooke et al., 2012; Methley et al., 2014). As a result, combining PICO's clarity with SPIDER's flexibility enables a nuanced understanding of research queries (Cooke et al., 2012; Methley et al., 2014). The SPIDER tool is applied to the research question in Table 2.

Table 2

The SPIDER Tool Applied to the Review Question

SPIDER Searches	
Sample	Athletes who had experienced racism within sport. Studies involving participants from EDCs. Athletes from different sports. Male and female athletes involved in amateur, semi-professional and professional sports.
Phenomenon of Interest	Athletes who have experienced racial discrimination, microaggressions, or systemic discrimination. Direct and indirect experiences of racism. The study examines the impact of racial trauma on mental health, performance, or general well-being.
Design	Includes studies with different research designs from published empirical literature.
Evaluation	Lived experiences of racial trauma among athletes and the coping mechanisms employed. The impact of racial trauma on areas including mental well-being, physical health or performance. Athletes' views on the cause of racial trauma. Characteristics of racial trauma, including how often it occurs and the severity of it within sports.
Research Type	Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research.

As the review question was not focused on a particular study approach, the SPIDER's 'Design' and 'Research Type' categories were not included in the searches. This was to ensure that relevant studies were not missed. Therefore, search terms fell into three categories, and initial searches were done combining all search terms, 'Sample' (S) OR 'Phenomenon of Interest" (PI) OR 'Evaluation' (E), but this returned a large number of studies that were not relevant to answering the research question. Other search strategies were trialled to

improve the relevance of studies, including shortening search terms where necessary to include all possible variations (e.g., Racis*). Boolean operators AND/OR were used to combine search terms differently, and inverted commas (“”) were used to narrow search results and find specific phrases. The final searches included (S) AND (P of I) AND (E) and are highlighted with further adaptations (see Table 3).

A range of general and specific search terms was used to cover a wide range of relevant literature (Higgins & Green, 2011; Methley et al., 2014). Important keywords included "athlete, "sport," "race," "racism," "microaggression," "mental health," "psychological distress," "anxiety," and "depression." These terms were selected by identifying keywords used in relevant studies, which enhanced the search strategy’s effectiveness by aligning it with existing research (Greenhalgh & Peacock, 2005). Additionally, the terms were selected based on their relevance to the research question, ensuring that the review captured studies that addressed the intersection of racial experiences and mental health within the athletic context (Higgins & Green, 2011). Terms like "trauma" and "PTSD" were left out to prevent narrowing down the search and potentially missing studies that discuss broader psychological consequences of racism without explicitly mentioning trauma or PTSD (Wilczynski et al., 2006). This method balances sensitivity and specificity by capturing a range of studies while concentrating on the most important aspects of racial trauma in athletics (Methley et al., 2014).

Table 3

Adapted SPIDER Search Strategy

SPIDER tool	Search Terms
Sample	Athlete OR Sport*
Phenomenon of Interest	Race OR Racis* OR microaggressi* OR micro-aggressi*
Evaluation	“Mental health” OR “psychological distress” OR anxiety OR depression

Selection Process

To ensure the efficacy and thoroughness of the SLR, specific methods were used to handle the volume of studies initially identified (Booth et al., 2016; Higgins & Green, 2011). For instance, Google Scholar searches were limited to 20 pages due to the large number of studies it returned that were not pertinent to the

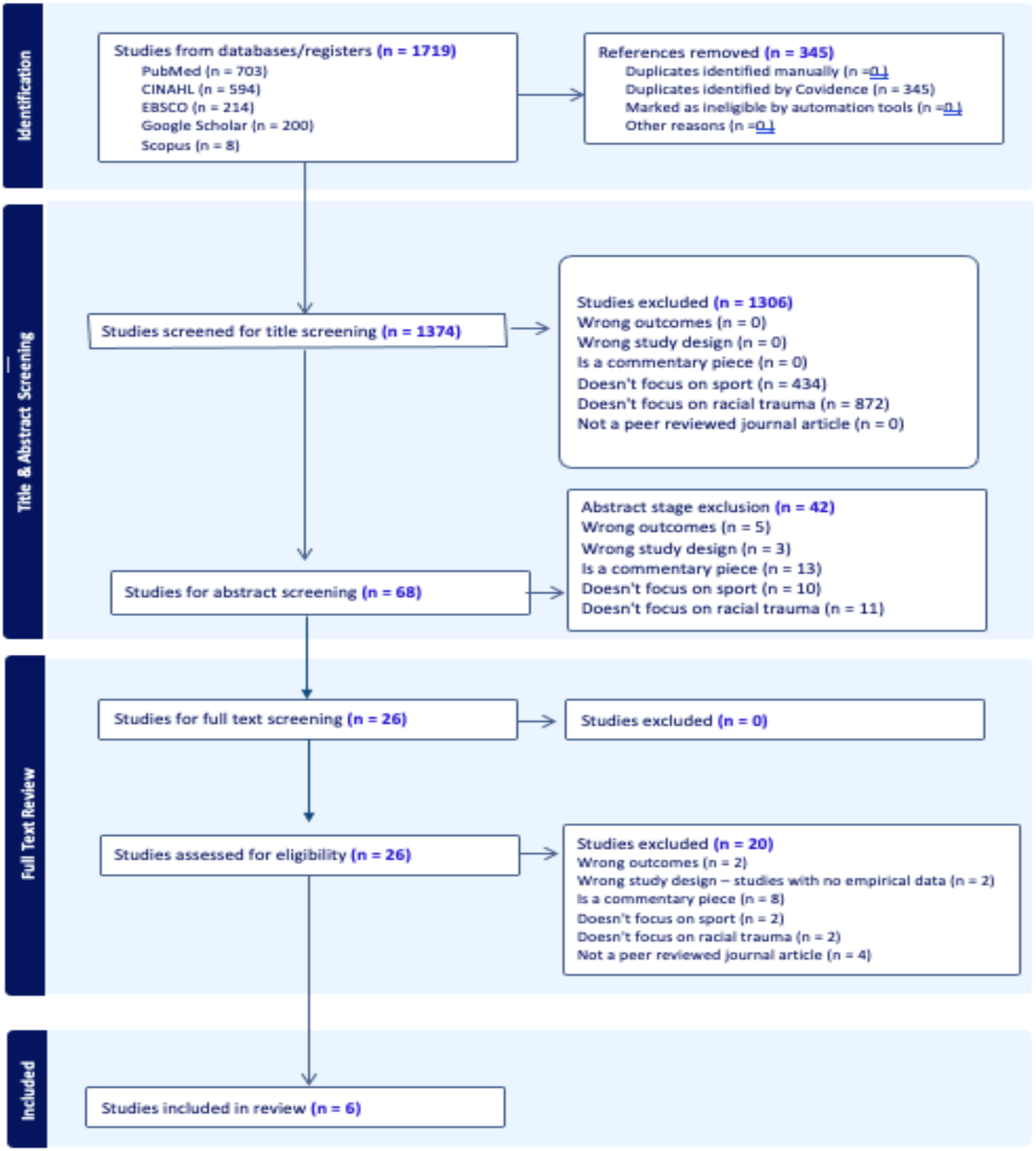
research query. This allowed for a more manageable selection of relevant research. Research suggests that relevant and high-quality studies are typically located within the first few pages of search results (Haddaway et al., 2015). All other databases were accessed without restrictions on the number of pages reviewed (Gehanno et al., 2013).

The review process is demonstrated in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis (PRISMA) diagram (see Figure 2). Following these principles ensured that the review was transparent, replicable, and thorough (Liberati et al., 2009). The first step involved the initial literature searches, which included searching terms, selecting databases and setting up the inclusion criteria for the SLR. Next, the searches were conducted, and the results were exported to a review management system (Covidence), and duplicate papers were removed. This was followed by three levels of screening (e.g., title, abstract, and full-text screening) assessed against the inclusion criteria (Liberati et al., 2009).

Covidence was used to review and manage the decisions of the 1719 studies initially identified in the searches. Two independent reviewers undertook title, abstract, and full-text screening of all the articles. Conflicts were resolved by the third independent reviewer, who decided on the study's inclusion. The PRISMA diagram has documented the rationale for excluding articles during the full-text screen. The reference lists of the selected papers were manually checked against the inclusion criteria to broaden the search (Horsley et al., 2011). However, this did not highlight any further studies, and as a result, the final review had six articles.

Figure 2

Prisma Diagram



Data Extraction

The process of extracting data followed the principles highlighted by systematic literature review, with a single reviewer and an adapted extraction form specific to the requirements of the review (Higgins & Thomas, 2023). Data extraction for all studies included aims, sample characteristics, methodology, and study limitations. Additionally, it included quantitative or qualitative outcomes related to racism. To ensure the research question was appropriately answered, extraction in the quantitative studies focused on descriptive data from measures like questionnaires (Robinson, 2007). On the other hand, qualitative studies included data from interviews or focus groups (Robinson, 2007). Table 4 summarises the included studies.

Table 4

Summary of Studies Included in the Review (chronological order)

Author, Title, Country	Aim	Participants/ Sample	Research Method	Key Findings	Strengths and limitations
Wilkerson et al. (2020) Black Football Student-Athletes' Perceived Barriers to Seeking Mental Health Services USA	Exploring the obstacles to accessing psychological support among black student football players.	Black male student football players (N = 9) Convenience sampling	Data collection: Semi-structured individual interviews Data analysis: phenomenological analysis/ TA	Participants did not access mental health support due to a lack of time, stigma, and the need to appear tough. Participants described not being aware of where to access support.	<u>Strengths</u> ● Focuses on an under-researched area. ● Bracketing, member checking, a pilot study, and triangulation were used. <u>Limitations</u> ● Participants came from the same university. ● The study was conducted at a particular time point. ● Potential response bias due to the researchers having relationships with participants. ● The presence of a black male researcher may introduce bias.

Ballesteros & Tran (2020) Under the Face Mask: Racial-ethnic minority student-athletes and Mental Health Use USA	This study examined the prevalence of mental health symptoms, service use, and factors that influence mental health service use in Racial-ethnic minority student-athletes (RESMA).	Student-athletes (N = 241) The sample included: African N = 110, Latin American = 66, Asian N = 69	Data collection: Quantitative study using a questionnaire to measure low mood, anxiety, and other disorders Data analysis: Logistic regression, descriptive statistics, chi-square	RESMA had high psychological needs but avoided using mental health services because of stigma, lack of knowledge of services, and confidentiality concerns. Support networks and positive attitudes led to increased use of services.	<u>Strengths</u> ● Provides detailed data on the use of mental health services in RESMA. ● Socio-economic factors that influence service use were identified. <u>Limitations</u> ● The data used was from one semester. ● Specific athlete factors that could impact mental health, such as specific sports and years of participation, were not measured. ● Many racial and ethnic groups were not included in the research. ● The study did not explore in-depth lived experiences of racism qualitatively. ● Outcome measures were not psychometrically validated.

Oshiro et al. (2020) Cyber Racism Toward Black Athletes: A Critical Race Analysis of TexAgs.com Online Brand Community USA	To explore fan racism about four black NFL players involved in athlete activism.	Online posts from fans aged between 30 and 55 (N = 631)	Data collection: Qualitative collective case study Data analysis: Content analysis	NFL players involved in activism were negatively labelled and received racist stereotypes, such as being described as thugs.	<u>Strengths</u> ● Critical Race Theory was effectively used in the data analysis. ● The study highlighted various forms of racism encountered by black athletes. ● Large sample of online posts. <u>Limitations</u> ● The study's focus is limited to one online community, limiting the findings' generalisability to broader communities. ● The study was focused on fans' perceptions of four athletes, and one athlete received considerably more racist posts than others, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other athletes. ● Limited discussion about the potential solutions to cyber racism.

Jasso et al. (2021) Differences in Ethnic and Sport Culture Salience Among College Students Participating in NCAA and Recreational Sports USA	Investigated the differences in cultural salience in student-athletes, which was used to inform mental health service development.	Student-athletes 38 males and 24 females aged over 18 (N = 62) The sample included: European American/White (37), Hispanic/Latina/o (16%), African American (13%), Asian/Asian American (9%), Pacific Islander (3%), and Other (21%)	Data collection: Quantitative using a demographic questionnaire and a cultural domain measure Data analysis: ANOVA & t-tests	Recreational athletes rated the importance of their ethnic culture higher than student-athletes. Student-athletes rated the importance of their sport culture higher than recreational athletes. The study found no significant differences in the importance of sport culture between EDCs and white students. EDC student athletes rated cultural salience more important than any other racial group.	<u>Strengths</u> ● The study explores an under-researched area. ● The findings may inform interventions that address the unique challenges experienced by EDC athletes. <u>Limitations</u> ● The small sample size meant that participants from six ethnic groups were grouped into a single category, which may overlook cultural differences among these groups. ● Uses novel self-reported measures that lack validation. ● Data collection occurred at a single time, meaning little is known about how cultural salience develops over time.

Economou et al., (2022) Black Student-Athletes and Racism Pandemic: Building Antiracist Practices in Athletics USA	Investigated black student athletes' experiences of the challenges with racial identity.	Black student-athletes Nine males and five females aged between 19 and 27 (N = 14) Purposeful sampling	Data collection: Semi-structured individual interviews Data analysis: Grounded theory	Participants experienced identity challenges due to racial abuse. Racism led to the perception that athletes were superior athletically and inferior intellectually. Playing sports improved mental well-being, but this worsened when their performances were impacted by poor form or injuries. There was limited awareness of white privilege among white teammates. Participants believed that racism in sports could be addressed by increasing diversity in leadership positions.	<u>Strengths</u> ● Provides insights into the lived experiences of systemic racism among black student-athletes. ● Grounded theory allowed for a nuanced understanding of experiences. ● Offers a framework for developing antiracist practices in athletes. <u>Limitations</u> ● The sampling method and the researchers' involvement in the interview process may introduce bias.

Newman et al. (2022) The dual pandemic: COVID-19, systemic racism, and college student-athletic mental health USA	Examined the mental health effects of COVID-19 and systemic racism on college students.	Student-athletes (N = 222) Convenience sampling	Data collection: Online survey measuring ability to cope with racism, athletic identity, career decision-making self-efficacy, and life skills A brief modified version of the Impact of Event Scale for COVID-19 Data analysis: Item-level Descriptive statistics and linear regression	COVID-19 and systemic racism were associated with mental health issues. Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) student-athletes had higher distress than white student-athletes. Distress was linked to poor athletic identity and having limited strategies to cope with racism.	<u>Strengths</u> ● The study focused on the BIPOC population, who are often under-represented in mental health research. ● Highlights the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racism. <u>Limitations</u> ● The BIPOC population were under-represented in the study. ● The lack of longitudinal data limits the ability to assess the long-term impacts of the dual pandemic.

Quality Assessment of Methodological Quality of the Literature Review

The studies included in this review were evaluated using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), which is a critical assessment tool developed for appraising research included in a mixed methods systematic review (Hong et al., 2018). The MMAT was selected because it is adaptable and has been extensively used in health-related systematic reviews, making it appropriate for assessing the methodological quality of a range of study designs (Archibald et al., 2021; Légaré et al., 2008; Mallouli et al., 2004; Squires et al., 2011). The tool appraises five research types: qualitative studies, randomised controlled trials, non-randomised studies, quantitative descriptive studies, and mixed methods studies (Hong et al., 2018).

The checklist begins with two initial screening questions for all studies, which ask whether the research question is clearly defined and if the data sufficiently answers that question. The second part of the checklist features distinct screening questions for specific study designs. The designs included in this review were qualitative and descriptive quantitative studies. For qualitative studies, reviewers evaluate the suitability of data sources and analytical methods. In addition, the reviewer is also required to assess how the study considers context and the researcher's influence on the results. For quantitative studies, reviewers assess the representativeness of the sample and the appropriateness of the employed strategies. Additionally, they evaluate the use of suitable measures and the adequacy of the response rate.

Screening questions may be answered ‘yes’, 'no', or ‘can’t tell’ if there is insufficient detail to indicate whether the criteria were met. The most recent version of the MMAT does not include the use of overall numerical scores for studies to encourage critical reflection and greater transparency in analysis (Hong et al., 2018). This review will align with the latest revisions of the MMAT. Three studies were appraised using the qualitative criteria, and three were evaluated against the quantitative criteria.

Positionality

I remained mindful of my position as a black male researcher during the SLR by reflecting on how my assumptions might impact the study. Adopting introspection within research is important for the depth of the research process, contributing to more credible research results (Zachariadis et al., 2013). Reflection of this capacity was facilitated by keeping reflective notes and using supervision, which allowed me to reflect on how

my lived experiences and cultural background impacted my approach to appraising the research (Martin et al., 2019). The critical appraisal summaries of three qualitative studies and three quantitative descriptive studies can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5

Mixed Method Appraisal of Included Studies (chronological order)

Author (s)	Screening questions		Qualitative					Quantitative (descriptive)					Comments
Wilkerson et al. (2020)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes						
Ballesteros & Tran (2020)	Yes	Yes						Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Many racial and ethnic groups were not included in the research. While a subset of RESMA is appropriately represented, it does not fully represent the whole population of RESMA in the USA. No information was provided on non-response bias.
Oshiro et al., 2020)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes						
Jasso et al. (2021)	Yes	Yes						Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	No information was provided on non-response bias.

Economou et al., (2022)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes					
Newman et al. (2022).	Yes	Yes						Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	The sample was not representative of the population and was limited to those available to participate.

Quality Appraisal of the Literature

Assessing the quality of research using assessment tools such as the MMAT is important as it influences the interpretation of the literature review findings (Tranfield et al., 2003). The results from this assessment indicated that this review encompassed studies of varying quality. For example, all three qualitative studies fulfilled all aspects of MMAT (Economou et al., 2022; Oshiro et al., 2020; Wilkerson et al., 2020), while among the three quantitative studies, one met 80% of the criteria (Newman et al., 2022) and two met 60% (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020; Jasso et al., 2021). This implies that the qualitative studies were methodologically strong and offered insights into athletes' experiences of trauma, and some quantitative studies may have constraints that could impact the research outcomes.

The qualitative studies lay the groundwork for understanding the dynamics of racial trauma within sports environments (Economou et al., 2022; Oshiro et al., 2020; Wilkerson et al., 2020). As an example, Economou et al. (2022) used grounded theory, which provides an understanding of how athletes' real-life experiences are interconnected, shedding light on how systemic racism affects their well-being and performance. This is in line with research that emphasises the impact of racial trauma and its emotional toll (Sue, 2010).

Oshiro et al. (2020) highlighted the prevalence of racist discourse online through a content analysis of cyber racism, examining a large sample of fans' online behaviour and an NFL player's response to racism. The large sample and use of diverse data sources suggest that the methodological approach was rigorous and comprehensive, aligning with other studies that show similar methods (Harrison et al., 2016). Furthermore, Wilkerson et al. (2020) used TA to identify the obstacles black athletes face when seeking support for their psychological well-being. Their use of TA, in-depth interviews, and methods like member checking mirrored methods utilised in previous research, which were shown to be important for creating tailored interventions to enhance athletes' mental well-being (Watson, 2005).

In comparison, the quantitative studies had some limitations. For instance, the researchers in one study, which met 80% of the criteria, used reliable and consistent psychometric scales to measure health outcomes. However, their study focused mainly on female participants, making it more difficult to apply the findings

outside of the female athlete experience (Newman et al., 2022). In line with this limitation, research has shown that males and females differ in how they respond to mental health issues (Gustafsson et al., 2017).

Moreover, all the quantitative studies were critiqued for having samples that under-represented EDC athletes (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020; Jasso et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2022), which indicates a possible sampling bias (Sue, 2010). Furthermore, some studies used outcome measures that were not validated (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020; Jasso et al., 2021), which may influence how accurately the data aligns with the measured constructs (DeVellis, 2016).

Additionally, all the studies took place in the USA, and most studies looked specifically at student-athletes (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020; Economou et al., 2022; Jasso et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2022; Wilkerson et al., 2020). This implies that the findings may not resonate with the experiences of racial trauma found in non-student athletes living in different regions. Geographical homogeneity may result in conclusions specific to a context and not easily transferable to wider populations, thus restricting the scope (Breitenecker & Harms, 2010).

To sum up this evaluation, qualitative studies may support understanding how racial trauma expresses itself in athletes due to their methods of data collection, which prioritise an in-depth understanding of personal lived experiences. The quantitative studies may help to further corroborate the findings of the qualitative studies (Robinson, 2007), but they must be discussed carefully due to a lack of valid measures and the under-representation of EDC athletes in their samples.

Synthesis of Main Findings from Literature Review

TA using NVivo 12 was conducted to analyse the studies and answer the review question (Thomas & Harden, 2008). During the first phase, important information about the research question was coded. These codes were then grouped into themes to capture the key ideas and then further analysed to develop analytical themes to provide insight into how athletes experienced racial trauma. This process combined the data from quantitative and qualitative studies to explore the research question.

Review Findings

The systematic literature review addressed the research question: 'What are the experiences of racial trauma among athletes?' Three of the included studies explored black athletes' challenges concerning racism and their racial identities (Economou et al., 2022; Oshiro et al., 2020; Wilkerson et al., 2020). Three studies examined a range of athletes from EDCs and assessed psychological distress and cultural salience (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020; Jasso et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2022). Although the studies did not directly address the research question of the SLR, the authors inferred symptoms of racial trauma from athletes' experiences with racism, which were captured through descriptive themes.

The data analysis of the six studies uncovered three main themes that pertained to the experiences of racial trauma in athletes: psychological distress, coping mechanisms, and navigating white spaces as an EDC athlete (see Table 6).

Table 6

Table of Themes

Main themes	Sub-themes
1. Psychological Distress	1.1. Feeling distressing emotions
	1.2. Re-experiencing and hypervigilance
	1.3. Avoidance
2. Coping Mechanisms	2.1. Activism
	2.2. Psychological Flexibility
	2.3. Community
	2.4. Culture
3. Navigating White Spaces as an EDC Athlete	3.1. Racial identity issues
	3.2. Navigating white spaces

Theme 1: Psychological Distress

Psychological distress in response to racism featured prominently in most studies (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020; Economou et al., 2022; Oshiro et al., 2020; Wilkerson et al., 2020). These symptoms were captured under sub-themes, including feeling distressing emotions, re-experiencing and hypervigilance, and avoidance.

Sub-theme 1.1: Feeling Distressing Emotions

The racism that led to emotional distress was expressed consistently among athletes, and it was observed across three studies (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020; Oshiro et al., 2020; Economou et al., 2022). It captured a range of intense and debilitating emotions, which included anxiety, fear, exhaustion, and frustration.

This was highlighted by athletes who expressed feeling "overwhelmed" and "exhausted" after experiencing racism (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020, p. 172). Athletes were also impacted by other difficult feelings, including disappointment and frustration, highlighted in two studies. One participant shared an off-field experience: "I was near my dorm late at night, and a big drunk group of students started shouting, 'Hey, nigger! Go back to Africa, nigger!' I wasn't mad so much as disappointed" (Oshiro et al., 2020, p. 926). Another participant highlighted:

> The only reason it bothers me is because it seems like it's the accepted way of calling somebody the N-word nowadays. That's where it takes me aback. What's the definition of a thug really? Is it a guy on a football field just trying to tackle people? (Oshiro et al., 2020, p. 924).

Disappointment rather than anger may indicate a complex emotional response, possibly stemming from sadness about the racist behaviour (Kawakami et al., 2009). Moreover, several athletes across the studies also described anxiety and feeling devalued, as highlighted by the following quotes: "When you know that you're walking on a tightrope, right, the anxiety that comes from knowing that if you slip, you can mess up everything" (Economou et al., 2022, p. 14) and "I felt like some people viewed me as dumb because you're just an athlete, you know, like, you just want the answers. In the classroom, they expect me to fail. I always felt very disposable as a black athlete" (Economou et al., 2022, p. 13).

Collectively, these studies show the varied emotional responses to racism in athletes and the complex nature of racism that can lead to certain emotions being more dominant than others.

Sub-theme 1.2: Re-experiencing and Hypervigilance

Participants across two studies discussed reliving past traumatic racial experiences and feeling hyper-alert to threats of racism (Economou et al., 2022; Wilkerson et al., 2020). Participants in one study shared how they re-experienced racism of the past and struggled to let difficult experiences go: "Thinking about

everything, it's hard to just kind of let it go, I guess" and "You kind of let it build up inside you" (Economou et al., 2022, p. 14). The difficulty in letting go of distressing thoughts and emotions may be indicative of an inability to process racial traumas (Borders & Liang, 2011).

The inability to deal with recurring negative thoughts and feelings can lead to some participants experiencing feelings of depression and inadequacy. One athlete said, "It [racism] wears you down" (Economou et al., 2022, p. 14), and another participant highlighted, "I feel like some people might feel like they are less than others because they need assistance with mental health" (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 72). This might suggest that some athletes feel inferior or inadequate for needing support with their mental health. The feeling of inadequacy may be linked to past racial traumatic memories, leading to a vicious cycle of cognitions and emotions connected with their traumatic experiences (Cénat, 2022).

The quote also suggests that the athlete was experiencing hypervigilance due to the potential threat of social scrutiny, which aligns with the experiences of trauma in army veterans (Cameron & Mamon, 2019). Further support for increased vigilance is highlighted in the statement: "When you know that you're walking on a tightrope... the anxiety that comes from knowing that if you slip, you can mess up everything. It's intense. It's very intense" (Economou et al., 2022, p. 14).

Despite the challenges of racial trauma, EDC athletes also experienced issues in receiving support for their mental health difficulties, as highlighted in two studies (Economou et al., 2022; Wilkerson et al., 2020). This was echoed by an athlete's reflection that to get support, you must "wear your mental health issue" (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 72). This indicates an expectation that mental health difficulties must be visible and severe enough to receive help. Additionally, several athletes in one study spoke about normalising their experiences and developing resilience to cope with racism: "That's just what it is being black" and "developing a thick skin [is necessary to cope with racism]" (Economou et al., 2022, p. 14).

Participants in this sub-theme described reliving experiences of racism and being on constant alert to future threats. This leads to emotional distress in the form of depression and feelings of inadequacy.

Sub-theme 1.3: Avoidance

Few studies discussed how athletes used avoidance to cope with racial trauma (Economou et al., 2022; Wilkerson et al., 2020). Athletes avoided various aspects of themselves, including their emotions, thoughts, and triggers related to racism.

Across the studies, avoidance was used to show toughness and to keep up with performance demands placed on black athletes. The need to show toughness was supported by the following quotes: "Never supposed to let nobody see them crying" (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 65), and participants expressed their fear of being perceived as “the weak guy that needs help” (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 64). Moreover, emotions were avoided to maintain performance: “When it comes to black people or black athletes in particular, you are only expected to offer one thing, and that is to produce on whatever playing field you exist on” (Economou et al., 2022, p. 13), and “Players try to hide it because they always want to show the coach they are here to go and for them (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 65).

Two studies discussed how athletes avoided distressing thoughts about racial abuse to manage their feelings (Economou et al., 2022; Wilkerson et al., 2020). One athlete said, "It’s kind of like shelving it and talking about it later" (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 65). In addition, participants reported that it was “hard to just kind of let it go” (Economou et al., 2022, p. 14).

Racial trauma may also increase avoidance of triggers that perpetuate upsetting thoughts and emotions, as reported in one study (Wilkerson et al., 2020). Athletes discussed avoiding different aspects of their lives, such as engaging in their sport and seeking help: “It makes you think about football or really life, like, is this really what I want to do? Do I really want to play this sport all my life?” (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 72). Other athletes avoided attending lectures and seeking mental health support. This is echoed by a participant who stated he "would rather be sleep" than seek help (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 72).

Participants avoided their emotions, thoughts, and triggers, highlighting that athletes employ different strategies to cope with racial trauma.

Theme 2: Coping Mechanisms

Most studies highlighted coping mechanisms athletes used to manage racially traumatic experiences (Economou et al., 2022; Jasso et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2022; Oshiro et al., 2020; Wilkerson et al., 2020). Athletes identified a range of coping mechanisms, including becoming activists, developing psychological flexibility, and using community and cultural factors.

Sub-theme 2.1: Activism

The activism sub-theme was highlighted as a coping mechanism employed in one study to manage racial trauma (Oshiro et al., 2020). The article described the positive and negative aspects of activism following experiences of racial prejudice. The participant in the study advised that his activism was influenced by several factors including obligation, empowerment, and scrutiny.

The athlete spoke about feeling obligated and empowered to fight against racial injustices and used his social media platforms to advocate for positive change: “I can’t hide behind the shield. I can’t hide behind the glamour and glitz of football and fame” (Oshiro et al., 2020, p. 925), and "By not standing [taking the knee], I wanted to honour the founding principles of this country, the freedom of self-expression, liberty, and the equal opportunity to pursue happiness." (Oshiro et al., 2020, p. 925). On social media, he stated, "Because of technology and social media, we can play a role in shaping this future. Ten of us in a room can reach fifty million people. That’s power, and we take it seriously" (Oshiro et al., 2020, p. 927). He also said, "I wanted to use my platform to inspire young people to see us not just as athletes or pitchmen for products, but as changemakers" (Oshiro et al., 2020, p. 925).

However, the athlete disclosed that he received a lot of criticism for being an activist against racism: "It makes some people so angry to see us taking a stand." Receiving such an angry reaction to activism may further exacerbate emotions of invalidation and marginalisation for those experiencing racial trauma (Gorski & Erakat, 2019). In addition, he advised, “This is why the big sports media networks, as well as the NFL and the police, scrutinise our platform so hard. They want us to be brands, not men” (Oshiro et al., 2020, p. 927), which reflects the tendency for society to commodify black athletes rather than acknowledge their thoughts, feelings, and individual experiences (Leonard, 2009).

Although this sub-theme only captures the perspective of one athlete, it highlights how racial trauma might be dealt with through activism. The participant spoke about various factors that influenced his motivations to be an activist, as well as some challenging aspects of it.

Sub-theme 2.2: Psychological Flexibility

Three studies highlighted a link between racial trauma and the use of psychological flexibility (Economou et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2022; Wilkerson et al., 2020). The sub-theme describes how athletes normalised and showed resilience to manage racism.

Athletes from EDCs may have higher levels of psychological flexibility built through navigating athletic endeavours, which may help to lessen the impact of racial trauma (Newman et al., 2022). Athletes described normalising racism and showing resilience to deal with prejudice (Economou et al., 2022; Wilkerson et al., 2020). This was supported by the statement: “I kind of just had to tell him, like, bro, you know, that’s just what it is sometimes, you know, that’s just what it is being black” (Economou et al., 2022, p. 14). This is further supported by the following quotes: "They felt they have to be tough because they have to compete" and "It’s about toughness, man" (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 72 & 66).

Meanwhile, some athletes alluded to the difficulty of maintaining psychological flexibility in the face of constant racism. Athletes described the need to personify strength and toughness “at all times” (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 65). However, being strong all the time can be challenging, as discussed by another athlete: “Developing a thick skin does wear you down a little bit” (Economou et al., 2022, p. 14). This suggests that over time, it is difficult for athletes to maintain psychological flexibility due to the cumulative negative effects of racial trauma (Williams et al., 2021).

This sub-theme demonstrates that athletes used psychological flexibility (e.g., normalising and showing resilience) to cope with racism. However, persistent encounters with prejudice can diminish its effectiveness.

Sub-theme 2.3: Community

The community sub-theme was prevalent in three research studies, providing insight into the support networks that were mostly used by athletes to manage racial trauma (Economou et al., 2022; Wilkerson et al., 2020). Athletes identified support systems such as teammates, coaches, and families and highlighted the ones they preferred.

Several athletes in a study highlighted their preference to confide in teammates from similar backgrounds and home communities instead of outsiders: “You come from different backgrounds, and you just can’t trust them with that type of information. It is just sometimes you don’t feel comfortable trusting a person” (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 69). Another participant echoed this: "Now we up here for four years out of your life, so it’s just different, like, you have to find a new crowd, but you don’t trust them like the people back home, so it’s just harder to communicate" (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 69). One athlete alluded to the role of coaches as support systems for players:

> That was really like my nuclear family; like, that’s where I spent the majority of my time growing up, and you learn just a crazy amount of lessons there. And you know, not having a father figure growing up like that was a super big aspect of football for me. At a very early age, I’ve been very close to my coaches” (Economou et al., 2022, p. 15).

However, some participants refuted the idea that sporting communities were supportive: "I don’t really think the community is too concerned about an athlete’s mental health" (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 69). In addition, another stated, "Nobody from his community came to me about any mental health services or anything like that" (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 69). Regarding coaches, participants argued that coaches did not provide adequate support for their mental health challenges: “They don’t want to talk about it [mental health]," “don’t care," and “all they care about is us playing football” (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 69). This lack of perceived community support might explain why players develop psychological flexibility and engage in avoidance behaviours.

In summary, the use of community networks by athletes experiencing racism varied. Some participants trusted their networks enough to confide in them. Whereas, some athletes did not confide in coaches and home networks at all.

Sub-theme 2.4: Culture

A few studies highlighted culture as a coping mechanism for racial trauma (Jasso et al., 2021; Wilkerson et al., 2020). The sub-theme investigated how athletes rely on their cultural norms and traditions rather than seeking professional mental health support.

Athletes spoke about the cultural norm of difficulties being addressed in the family home and the stigma of accessing mental health services: “The black family, the momma, is usually the one holding everything down. So, I feel that’s the strongest person in the family. You can go to her to talk” (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 70). Another athlete highlighted that “is how they grew up. Like if you gotta problem, you tell your mom. You talk to your mom whether you grown or not. Like that is just how we do things” (Wilkerson et al., 2020 p. 70). Furthermore, several participants discussed the stigma associated with accessing support. This quote summarises the view of several athletes in this study: "You are considered weak if you talk to a counsellor" (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 65). These reflections are supported by Jasso et al. (2021), who found that athletes from EDCs saw connecting with their ethnic culture as more important than athletes from ethnic majority backgrounds. This suggests that some athletes' aversion to psychological therapies was linked to a strong connection with their ethnic background that stigmatises mental health support.

Coping with racial trauma through culture highlighted that athletes used their family support to manage difficulties instead of accessing professional support, which was often frowned upon. This challenges the previous sub-theme, which found that some participants avoided using their home communities to cope with racial abuse. This highlights that athletes may use their networks in some circumstances and not in others.

Theme 3: Navigating White Spaces as an EDC Athlete

This final theme explored how athletes’ racial traumatic experiences may have impacted how they viewed themselves and managed sports environments that lacked ethnic diversity. This theme was divided into

the sub-themes racial identity issues and navigating white spaces, which were highlighted in three studies (Economou et al., 2022; Oshiro et al., 2020; Wilkerson et al., 2020).

Sub-theme 3.1: Racial Identity Issues

Racial identity issues may emerge in EDC athletes who experience racial trauma, leading them to form negative self-perception, which is discussed in three studies (Economou et al., 2022; Oshiro et al., 2020). In this section, participants disclosed their experiences of racial stereotyping and microaggressions, which have been linked to increased racial identity issues.

Athletes in both studies discussed experiencing racial microaggressions: “On campus, sometimes people treated me like a hero, a god because football is king in Texas. But other times, with the pads off, I was anything but” (Oshiro et al., 2020, p. 926). Other participants supported this by discussing how others perceived him as dangerous because he was black: “Even if we’re not going to do anything, the assumption is already there from the jump” (Economou et al., 2022, p. 13). Experiencing racial microaggressions over a long period can develop into negative perceptions of one's racial identity (Nadal et al., 2013; Sue et al., 2007).

In one study, athletes experienced racial stereotyping, highlighted by the statement, "Oh, he's black. He's automatically he has to be an athlete" (Economou et al., 2022, p. 12). In addition, others alluded to the overinflated pressure for black athletes to “excel” in sports (Economou et al., 2022, p. 12). This suggests that athletes were seen primarily based on their athletic abilities. Research highlights that racial stereotyping can lead to individuals engaging in behaviours that suppress their racial identities. For instance, this may mean changing the way they speak to fit in (McGee, 2016). Few athletes discussed the frustration of being reduced to their athletic abilities (Oshiro et al., 2020). An athlete discussed: “Is being nerdy of interest? Do they celebrate things that have happened in the life of my community? You come to find out, painfully, that the answer is ‘no,’ then why should we care?’’(Oshiro et al., 2020, p. 926). The quote suggests that the focus on athletic performance can overshadow other important areas of an individual’s life.

Athletes in the studies were impacted by subtle forms of racism (e.g., stereotypes based on race and microaggressions), which, over a long period, can lead to them developing difficulties in how they view themselves.

Sub-theme 3.2: Navigating White Spaces

One article discussed the impact of race on positioning and how EDC athletes manage being in majority-white institutions (Economou et al., 2022). This sub-theme discusses the pressure to be knowledgeable about white culture.

Participants described feeling obligated to have an understanding of white culture but perceived this was not reciprocated for their culture. The following quote supported this: “It really bothered me to know that we, as black people, have to know the ins and outs of almost everything that pertains to white people. White schooling, white education, white culture.” (Economou et al., 2022, p. 15), and “A lot of my teammates were allowed to be ignorant and not maliciously ignorant, just ignorant to everything pertaining to Black culture.” (Economou et al., 2022, p. 15). Existing literature has shown that adapting to white cultural norms can perpetuate racial trauma symptoms and prevent people from challenging systemic racism (Cénat, 2022; Liu et al., 2019).

This sub-theme only featured one study. However, the issue of navigating white spaces has been highlighted in previous studies. Participants felt frustrated about needing to invest energy into conforming to white institutions, which can lead to psychological and emotional distress.

Discussion

To the author's knowledge, this is the first literature review to explore the experiences of racial trauma among athletes. The studies included in this review provided insights that helped to address the review question, offering an understanding of the distressing impact of racial trauma. It is important to note that the conclusions drawn from these studies are specific to US student-athletes and may not be generalisable to athletes in other contexts or regions. Studies focusing specifically on black athletes experiences of racism found that athletes with racial traumatic experiences encountered psychological distress symptoms in the form of distressing emotions, re-experiencing, hypervigilance, and avoidance behaviours (Economou et al., 2022; Oshiro et al., 2020; Wilkerson et al., 2020). The findings also highlighted that athletes used several coping strategies to manage racially traumatic encounters, including activism, psychological flexibility, community and cultural strategies (Economou et al., 2022; Jasso et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2022; Oshiro et al., 2020;

Wilkerson et al., 2020). Finally, the results indicated that athletes from EDCs experienced racial identity challenges, which impacted their ability to manage predominantly white sports environments (Economou et al., 2022; Oshiro et al., 2020).

The trauma symptoms experienced by athletes, as highlighted in psychological distress and coping mechanisms themes, were corroborated in several non-athlete studies. For instance, racial trauma that led to distressing emotions was supported by a study that found correlations between trauma and disorders like depression and PTSD in black and Latino students (Edman et al., 2015; Ghafoori et al., 2012). Furthermore, racial discrimination has been linked to dissociative symptoms in African-American adults (Polanco-Roman et al., 2016; Harb et al., 2023), which aligns with the re-experiencing and increased vigilance found in athletes in the literature review. Moreover, the athletes' use of social support networks, psychological flexibility, and activism as a preventative measure for the distressing effects of racial trauma have all been reported before in research as strategies to manage racial stress (Harper et al., 2018; van der Merwe et al., 2020).

These findings validate athletes' experiences of racism, as highlighted in the literature review. They suggest that student-athletes' experiences of racism within a sporting context can appear similar to individuals who have encountered racism in non-sport contexts where racial trauma is better established. Since the majority of studies in the review focused on student-athletes, future studies should concentrate on understanding how racial trauma operates in professional athletes performing in high-profile sports where racial scrutiny is likely to be more common.

The systematic review findings may apply to student-athletes in the USA but may not be applicable to understanding experiences of racial trauma in non-student athletes in other parts of the world. As this literature review builds onto the current UK-based research project, it is important to note that there are distinctions between American and British lived experiences and sporting structures, meaning that attempting to apply the findings from this region to the UK might overlook distinct athlete experiences. Additionally, the systematic literature review included a small number of studies (6) from under-representative samples of EDC athletes (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020; Jasso et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2022), and the findings from four studies were obtained by recruiting athletes from one university (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020; Economou et al., 2022; Jasso et

al., 2021; Wilkerson et al., 2020). This means experiences of racial trauma may only be relevant to athletes enrolled at specific universities. It is, therefore, essential to interpret the review results with caution, and it is recommended that to deepen our understanding of racial trauma in athletes, research must explore larger populations of student and non-student athlete experiences.

The thematic synthesis approach was also a strength of the review as it supported the combination of data from various studies, providing insights into connecting themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008). It also ensured that the voices and perspectives of athletes were portrayed in detail (Noblit & Hare, 1988). However, it was limited by only being able to identify six relevant papers, which suggests that racial trauma in sport is not well-established. Sports research has given greater attention to issues such as sexual discrimination, experiences of LGBTQ+ athletes (Melton & Cunningham, 2014), and traumatic brain injuries (Sahler & Greenwald., 2012; Wallace & Mannix, 2021). This focus may contribute to the lack of understanding and responsiveness to racial trauma in sports, causing those affected to feel ignored and invalidated (Singer, 2005).

None of the studies directly looked at athletes' experiences of racial trauma. Instead, it was inferred through the review's synthesis process. Additionally, the lack of relevant studies also necessitated broadening the evidence base by including studies that clustered different ethnicities under broad umbrella terms like ‘RESMA’ and ‘BIPOC’ or recruiting a small sample of black athletes in their studies. Subsequently, this limited the review’s scope and highlighted the need for more representative and inclusive research.

Clinical Implications

The systematic review suggests several recommendations for understanding and supporting athletes who experience racial trauma. For instance, Ballesteros and Tran (2020) suggested that the provision of education and prevention strategies needed to be increased in order to raise awareness in sport about racial trauma and support services. Mental health clinicians would need training on racial trauma and cultural competence for these support services to be effective (Sue, 2007; Watson, 2005). Moreover, psychological interventions must be adapted to support athletes' needs appropriately (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020).

Improving performance can be a catalyst in driving change, as dealing with the effects of racial trauma can positively impact performance, the effectiveness of coaching, and the organisation's overall success

(Hertzler-McCain et al., 2023). This highlights the significance of implementing inclusive strategies in sports environments and understanding how racial trauma can influence and shape team and organisational dynamics (Cunningham & Sagas, 2004; Ruggiero & Lattin, 2008).

Practical Implications

The review highlights the importance of approaches to challenge biases and stereotypes within sports environments that negatively impact black athletes. These include recruiting more individuals from EDCs into leadership roles, facilitating spaces for open discussions about race and racial identity issues, and offering training on antiracism and privilege (Economou et al., 2022). A final recommendation calls for more research to understand how racism operates within other online sports communities and how it impacts the experiences of black athletes. Understanding how online communities function, regarding whether they uphold or challenge racism, provides important insights into how systems can respond to racist abuse online (Oshiro et al., 2020).

Gaps in the Literature

Several studies in this review explored how racial trauma in black athletes impacts help-seeking, racial identity, and psychological distress (Ballesteros & Tran., 2020; Economou et al., 2022; Jasso et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2022; Oshiro et al., 2020; Wilkerson et al., 2020). However, none of these studies directly examined the effects of racial trauma. Therefore, research focusing on this area would help to address this gap and contribute to understanding how racial trauma operates in sport.

Most studies focused on student-athletes in the US without specifying the sport they played. Moreover, there was a lack of diversity of EDC athletes among the studies. This highlights several research gaps. Future research should, therefore, seek to understand the experiences of racial trauma from a non-student perspective in countries other than the US. Additionally, getting a greater representation of racial trauma experiences in different sports and levels of competitiveness would be useful. Research in this area can go down several different avenues. However, it may be useful to target understanding racial trauma in a popular sport like football, where the results could have wide-reaching implications.

Conclusions

This systematic literature review showed that there was limited research exploring experiences of racial trauma in athletes. The review suggests that EDC athletes with experiences of racial trauma relive difficult emotions and thoughts and try to avoid them along with trauma reminders and triggers to maintain high performance on the field. Additionally, racial traumatic experiences may contribute to EDC athletes' feeling hypervigilant about making errors on the field or experiencing negative outcomes that may impact their careers. Coping mechanisms, including engaging in activist movements, becoming psychologically flexible, and utilising community and cultural factors, were important in navigating the challenges of racial trauma. These coping strategies allowed athletes to assert agency, challenge systemic inequalities, and develop resilience to manage difficult situations. Furthermore, the difficulty experienced navigating white spaces was emphasised by the need to address racial identity issues and develop mechanisms for dealing with the challenges that arise in predominantly white spaces in sports. Acknowledging and addressing these areas may create environments that are more inclusive and supportive for athletes from EDCs.

The Rationale for the Current Research Project

The systematic literature review highlighted an absence of research directly exploring the lived experiences of racism among athletes that explicitly leads to mental health problems. This particular research gap is important to investigate due to the scrutiny and high expectations that athletes face within sport, which can worsen the impact of racial trauma. The literature on the effects of racial trauma in educational and employment settings has shown that it can lead to severe mental health disorders (Carter, 2007; Williams & Mohammed, 2008). In addition, the literature review findings implied that athletes from EDCs were as susceptible to suffering similar psychological issues. This stresses the need for research that explores this topic further.

Football is a reasonable research focus for racial trauma, considering its global appeal and cultural importance. Moreover, footballers often face discrimination both during and outside of games because of their prominent positions in society. Statistics also show that racism is a big problem in elite football, as it accounts for half of the reports of discrimination in football (Kick It Out, 2024). These findings highlight the problematic

nature of racism in football and the importance of understanding how these experiences can become traumatic to footballers. Unaddressed racial trauma can contribute to significant mental health difficulties, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Brondolo et al., 2016; Sibrava et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2019), emphasising the importance of exploring these experiences in detail within the context of professional football in the UK.

The importance of exploring the challenges of racial trauma in footballers in the UK is further accentuated by the public and media attention that racial incidents attract, which may be reflective of the broader societal concern about the issue. Consequently, this research may help to raise awareness and increase discourse about persistent societal issues. Moreover, research in this area may also provide football clubs and governing bodies valuable insights into strategies for supporting players and promoting diversity and inclusion.

This current study aims to shed light on the experiences of racial trauma among footballers in the UK and contribute to creating environments that are more supportive and less likely to perpetuate racial discrimination and bias. The research questions were developed through appraising the gaps in the literature and are as follows:

1. What are footballers' experiences of racial trauma?
2. How does racial trauma impact the mental health of footballers?
3. What do footballers who experience racial trauma recommend to better support players who experience racial trauma?

Chapter Three: Method

Chapter Overview

This section provides an overview of the methodology employed to answer the research questions and delineate the research design and rationale for reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). It will also present the epistemological position, the data collection process and the sample characteristics. Lastly, this chapter will also reflect on and address ethical considerations and appraise the quality of the study.

Epistemology

Epistemology refers to understanding what can be considered knowledge. It is important in research as it is a basis for understanding the knowledge creation and validation process within research (Carter & Little,

2007; Pellegrino, 2021; Staller, 2012). It helps to promote depth and credible research findings by explaining the preconceptions that influence the methods used in a study (Carter & Little, 2007).

The current qualitative study employed a critical realist perspective, which provided a thorough framework to understand racial trauma among footballers (Archer et al., 2013). Critical realism acknowledges that human experiences are impacted by real things happening but are shaped by the individual's socio-cultural background (Archer et al., 2013). Adopting this epistemological position aligns with understanding the experiences of racial trauma in footballers as it acknowledges both the subjective and objective explanations of players' individual experiences of racism (Danermark et al., 2019).

This study used semi-structured interviews to collect data, which allowed the researcher to capture diverse perspectives of racial trauma and allowed participants to express their stories using their own language (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Maxwell, 2008; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This aligns with the critical realist approach, concerned with causal mechanisms and critically engaging with knowledge and lived experiences (Cassell et al., 2018; Fletcher, 2016).

The study used RTA for data analysis, which complimented the critical realist approach. For instance, RTA involves iteration and the researchers' engagement in deep reflection throughout the research process, which corresponds with the appreciation of objective and subjective interpretation in critical realism (Archer et al., 2013).

Research Design

Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative research methods seek to gain an in-depth understanding of a group of people's lived experiences and perceptions, helping to understand specific behaviours and the factors influencing them (Tuckerman et al., 2020), which can be challenging to capture using quantitative methods exclusively (Foley & Timonen, 2014). Qualitative research also supports a focus on ascribing meaning to participants' behaviours, hypothesis-building, and expanding and deepening the understanding of quantitative data (Flick, 2007; Korstjens & Moser, 2017). These approaches are versatile and adjustable, meaning that researchers can change their methods in response to emerging results, thus ensuring that a range of human behaviours are captured

(Fossey et al., 2002). Qualitative research methods are useful in several fields, including healthcare and education, contributing to a deeper understanding of individuals' experiences of these services, which have helped shape patient care and educational policies (Kozleski, 2017; Malterud, 2001). Considering how these methods have been effectively applied in other contexts, they may also be adequate for use in sport settings to better understand footballers' experiences of racial trauma.

Qualitative Design Rationale. Chapter One reviewed the literature on racism in athletes and found that there was an absence of research exploring how racial trauma directly impacted athletes in all sports globally. This highlighted an important opportunity to explore this in UK sport through qualitative research. This would add to existing literature by offering an in-depth perspective of athletes' experiences, contributing to a better understanding of how racial trauma operates in sports.

Given how popular football is in the UK and the extensive reports of racial abuse that players face (Goddard & Wilson, 2008; Holland, 1997), a decision was made for the current study to focus on exploring racial trauma in professional footballers. A qualitative design represents the most suitable approach to explore this issue further because there is a lack of research offering insights into the lived experiences of footballers, particularly regarding the mental health impact of racism (Bennett, 2020).

In football research, there has been an overreliance on quantitative approaches to understanding racism in footballers. While these approaches can help to understand how commonly racism occurs, they overlook the players' narratives and how it impacts their mental well-being (Bennett, 2020; Bradbury, 2011; Cleland, 2013; King, 2004). Additionally, questionnaire-based studies lack the depth required to understand how racism impacts individual players, leading to a limited understanding of their difficulties (Carmody et al., 2020; Cashmore & Cleland, 2011).

The lack of research on racial trauma in footballers highlights the importance of using qualitative methods to gain a better understanding of how it impacts players. Through the use of data collection methods like interviews and focus groups, researchers can gather detailed information about footballers' personal experiences of racial trauma (Flick, 2007; Welch & Patton, 1992). Additionally, these approaches can help to uncover socio-economic and other contextual factors that may influence these experiences and how they are

managed (Flick, 2012; Welch & Patton, 1992). Another benefit is that qualitative approaches may inform therapeutic interventions and anti-racism strategies (King, 2004; Williams & Mohammed, 2008). This may contribute to better support for players experiencing racial trauma and more inclusive football environments. Thus, qualitative research design is adequate for the current study as it can fill the research gap.

Trustworthiness. Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is essential as it provides the foundation for a study's integrity (Lincoln, 2007). It emphasises that the credibility and authenticity of the research rely on contextual factors, researchers' interpretations, and the iterative process of information and reflection (Aguinaldo, 2015). The use of RTA enhanced the study's credibility as it involved a process of in-depth immersion with the data and the researchers' ongoing reflection on their perceptions and emerging themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019a). It also refers to the degree to which results can be generalised to other contexts (Shenton, 2004) and how well the information of the study is documented. Lastly, to ensure trustworthiness, the research must demonstrate how the findings are grounded in the participants' experiences and not impacted by biased perspectives (Berger, 2013). To ensure these factors were met, the researcher used the Eight Big-Tent Criteria (see Table 10) to appraise the quality of the study (Tracy, 2010).

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

RTA involves recognising, analysing, and recording patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021) and includes several stages, including familiarisation with the data, coding, producing initial themes, developing themes, refining and defining themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2021). RTA allows researchers to understand the meaning behind subjective experiences, providing deeper insights into the psychological and emotional dimensions of behaviour and how these behaviours sit within broader social and cultural contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 2021; Byrne, 2022). Given the lack of open discourse about mental health within professional football (Bennett, 2021), this approach encourages in-depth exploration of lived experiences, contributing to a better understanding of the mental health concerns within sport.

Importantly, RTA acknowledges the researcher's influence on shaping the analysis and highlights the significance of reflecting thoughtfully on the reflexive relationship between the researcher, data, and analytical process (Braun & Clarke, 2019b, 2021). This included considering the most appropriate qualitative data

analysis method. Inductive and deductive coding methods were considered. Inductive coding ensures footballers' lived experiences are captured without assistance from pre-existing theories (Proudfoot, 2022). Some researchers suggest that this approach can be useful when researching an unexplored topic, such as racial trauma in footballers, as it can highlight new patterns and themes that may not have previously been considered (Swain, 2018). Deductive coding involves validating findings using pre-existing racial trauma theories (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Considering the strengths of both coding methods, a decision was made to combine approaches for analysis, allowing new themes to be decided from the data while also incorporating theory (Proudfoot, 2022). This approach has proven beneficial in research where unexpected findings may arise, requiring interpretation within the framework of existing theories (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This approach acknowledges the complexity of racial trauma (Proudfoot, 2023). This analysis also used latent coding to provide further depth to the codes that emerged from the combined inductive and deductive analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Latent coding makes analysis more comprehensive by uncovering underlying meanings from theory (Braun & Clarke, 2012), which can transcend the existing knowledge base and provide novel insights (Charmaz, 2006). This approach allowed the findings to extend beyond the surface-level meaning, which aligned with the research aims (Wæraas, 2022).

Strengths and Limitations of RTA. A notable strength of RTA is the flexibility it offers researchers to adapt approaches to suit the specific requirements of their studies, providing an opportunity for detailed and nuanced perspectives in areas with limited research coverage (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Trainor & Bundon, 2021). However, the flexibility of RTA can also be a limitation, as it may lead to the assumption that it is specifically compatible with phenomenological approaches. This can limit it to being seen as a theoretically adaptable method suitable for qualitative research that is experiential and reflexive (Braun & Clarke, 2019a). Moreover, the presumption that RTA is exclusively aligned with experiential or realist perspectives may limit the potential for comprehensive interpretative theorised analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 2021). This may encourage researchers to lean more on interpretative methods to expand their analysis, which may be inappropriate, leading to a less trustworthy data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This weakness may be

addressed by researchers specifying the philosophical and theoretical basis of using RTA, which may contribute to ensuring that it is not treated as an atheoretical approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

As discussed in the previous section, RTA highlights the importance of researchers being reflexive, facilitating the process of critically engaging with their preconceptions and biases throughout the data analysis. However, researchers claim the lack of clarity about what this process entails can significantly impact the comprehensiveness of the analysis process, leading to ambiguity and misunderstandings, which may affect the quality of the research (Nowell et al., 2017). To address this, Braun and Clarke (2021) recommend that researchers reflect on how closely they follow procedures and discuss the rationale for deviating from the six-phase approach.

Alternative Methodologies

Several methodologies were considered for the current study to comprehensively address the research question, including narrative analysis (NA). NA explores how people construct and express their lived experiences and identities through telling stories (Esin et al., 2014; Stephens & Breheny, 2012). It provides a useful understanding of the interconnectedness of identity, social dynamics, and personal experiences (Stephens & Breheny, 2012). Although this approach would prioritise extensive narratives of EDC footballers (Patterson, 2008), the current study's main purpose was to collectively understand specific experiences of racial trauma by compiling common themes across individual accounts.

Moreover, NA is more attuned to social constructionist epistemology than to critical realism. Social constructionist ideas posit that reality is socially constructed through language and collaboratively making sense of meaning. This aligns with NA as it relates to how people build and express their experiences and identities through telling stories (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). However, critical realists argue that reality is developed through cultural, social, and historical contexts despite acknowledging an underlying reality that exists independently of human awareness (de Souza, 2014). Although NA may be combined with critical realism to explore experiences and how reality is interpreted, it may diminish the role of fundamental structures and dynamics that influence these narratives, making NA an inappropriate choice for this study (Cassell et al., 2018).

Theoretical Perspective

The study was based on the DSM-5 racial trauma model (see Figure 1), as highlighted in Chapter One, which suggests that racism may result in trauma responses that correspond with the DSM-5 (Williams et al., 2018). The framework was used in the analysis process to understand the mental health consequences of racism in footballers and thus inform theme development. This approach guided both the analysis and data collection processes (e.g., interview schedule) to ensure that the examination of the complexities surrounding racial trauma within football was a thorough process (Williams et al., 2018).

Data Collection

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are valuable in qualitative studies involving structured and unstructured questioning (Wilson, 2012). This data collection method was selected because it promotes sharing lived experiences by allowing participants to explore in-depth perceptions, attitudes, and impacts (Adams, 2015). They were also selected to offer flexibility for unforeseen topics (Kallio et al., 2016). Focus groups were considered for collecting data, as they have been used extensively in qualitative research to explore the experiences of ethnically diverse groups (Pollack, 2003; Walls & Hall, 2017). However, the decision was made to use individual interviews due to the sensitive nature of interview questions. This necessitated an approach that provided players assurances of their privacy and safety (Yalch et al., 1992), considering the anticipated emotional distress of their experiences with racial trauma. The lack of privacy in focus group settings may have hindered players from feeling fully comfortable to share their perspectives (Arróliga et al., 2015). Moreover, taking into account the lack of open discourse about mental health within professional football, there was a potential that focus groups would be hard to organise. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were deemed the most appropriate.

Interview Schedule

The interview schedule was developed through discussions within the research team, which involved several rounds of brainstorming ideas and refining questions to ensure they fully addressed the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This promoted the sharing of different ideas and perspectives, which

ensured that the schedule was relevant to the research aims, sensitive to participants' backgrounds and devoid of biases (Guest et al., 2013; Hutter et al., 2011). Furthermore, the DSM-5 Racial Trauma Framework was incorporated to shape the interview schedule to ensure that questions closely reflected experiences of racial trauma. This theoretical basis was instrumental in formulating questions that directly addressed the mental health impacts of racism (Williams et al., 2018). The questions included a series of follow-up questions to expand participants' responses, and a pilot interview was conducted with the research team. The pilot interview further supported the refinement of questions to ensure that all questions added value to the research findings (Majid et al., 2017).

Professional Consultation

A key actor within the football industry was consulted about the research project, as research suggests that consultation within research can facilitate recruitment processes in studies (Newington & Metcalfe, 2014). This was consistent in the current study, as the consultant was able to leverage their experience to support recruitment as well as provide ethical guidance specific to professional football. During the consultation, we discussed the study objectives and explored several aspects of the interview schedule and methods that would maximise recruitment, including engaging with anti-racist organisations. The consultant advised that these organisations might be able to facilitate finding suitable participants for the study due to their existing relationships with players. Additionally, the consultant provided some invaluable information about the football industry regarding the likely pushback we could face when approaching clubs directly about the project. The consultant advised that clubs might be apprehensive about negative publicity or damage to their reputation should the study findings uncover cases of racism in their clubs. Therefore, a decision was made to focus recruitment through the researchers' personal networks and gatekeepers.

Participants

Study Criteria

Participants were eligible to take part in the study if they were 18 years and older, self-identifying as an individual from an EDC with experiences of racism in football. Participants were required to have experience playing football at a semi-professional or professional level or be retired professionals. These groups were

selected as they differ in the pressures they face. Including professionals at different levels would, therefore, broaden the range of perspectives on lived experiences of racial trauma (Pink et al., 2018). Participant recruitment followed these criteria to ensure the sample was diverse and representative. The inclusion and exclusion criteria can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion	Exclusion
Over 18	Under 18
Self-identifies as being from an EDC (black, black British, Caribbean or African, any other mixed or multiple ethnic background, Asian or Asian British, or any other ethnic group).	Does not identify as being from an EDC.
Have experienced racism in football.	Does not have experiences of racism in football.
Have experience playing football at a semi-professional or professional level, or are retired professionals.	Does not have experience playing football at a semi-professional or professional level or are retired professionals.

Recruitment

The recruitment of footballers occurred between October 2023 and March 2024, using a mixture of purposive and snowball sampling methods to ensure the sample included a diverse range of participants with relevant experiences (Robinson, 2007). The research team identified several participants by contacting their existing personal networks. Others joined the study through participants sharing details of the research within their networks with eligible participants (Berg, 2014). This is recommended for recruiting participants for research exploring sensitive topics (Braun & Clarke, 2013a; Habenstein, 2017). Including gatekeepers within the recruitment process can facilitate rapport building with participants, making data collection processes more efficient and decreasing dropout rates (Habenstein, 2017).

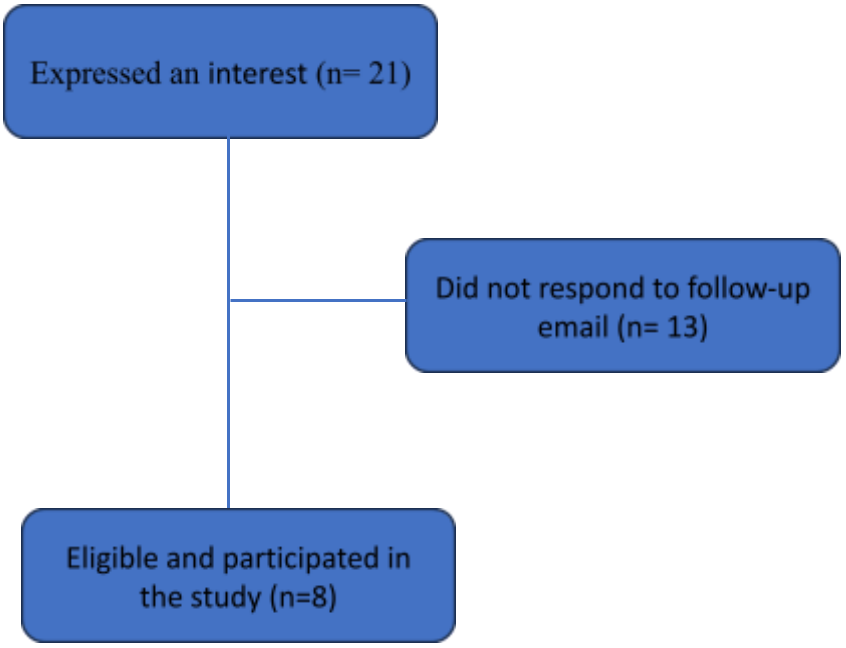
Relevant anti-racism football organisations were contacted about recruitment, but attempts to access participants through this channel were unsuccessful. Therefore, we decided to post the study's recruitment poster (see Appendix B) on social media platforms like LinkedIn and X (formerly known as Twitter). Social

media is frequently utilised for recruitment in qualitative studies, helping to facilitate relationships with professional organisations associated with the population of interest (Leighton et al., 2021; Robinson, 2013).

Interested participants were given the participant information sheet (see Appendix J), which highlighted how to take part, what the research project entailed, and a link to the online demographic form (see Appendix L). Participants were also sent the consent form (see Appendix E), which explained their rights as participants in the study. Figure 3 outlines the recruitment process undertaken in this study.

Figure 3

Recruitment Flowchart



Sample Size

Gathering detailed data requires a study to have an appropriate number of participants. Conventionally, this means conducting twelve interviews, which are seen as the data saturation point (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). However, this approach has been critiqued as it has the potential to ignore the subtle differences within the data (Varpio et al., 2017). Therefore, the study aligned with the recommendation to target a sample size large and diverse enough to sufficiently answer the research (Hennink et al., 2017).

Participant Demographics

The participants ranged from 20 to 42 years old and were all male, self-identifying as African, Pakistani, Indian, and Caribbean. They played football at different levels, from professional to semi-professional, and had between 1 and 10 years of playing experience. Several of the participants had stopped playing professional football. Table 8 provides the demographic data of the participants.

Table 8

Participant Information

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Self-identified Ethnicity	Highest Level Played in Football	Years of Playing Experience	Current Playing Status
Ezekiel	31	Male	African	Professional	7	Retired player
Saul	32	Male	African	Professional	10	Retired player
Gerald	40	Male	Pakistani	Professional	5	Inactive for personal reasons
Samuel	42	Male	Indian	Semi-professional	4	Active amateur player
Matthew	20	Male	African	Semi-professional	1	Active amateur player
Caleb	25	Male	Caribbean	Semi-professional	5	Active player
Reece	27	Male	African	Professional	9	Active player
Denny	22	Male	African	Professional	3	Active amateur player

Ethical Considerations

The current study received ethical approval from the University of Hertfordshire ethics committee (see Appendix D) and was regarded as posing minimal risk to participants' well-being. The British Psychological Society guidelines were implemented throughout the study to ensure safe and ethical research practice (Oates et al., 2021; The British Psychological Society, 2021). Table 9 demonstrates how ethics were met in the study.

Table 9

Ethical Considerations of the Study

Ethical Consideration	How This Criteria Was Met
Informed consent	Information sheets (see Appendix J) were given to all participants interested in participating in the study. The information sheet outlined the study objectives, participants' expectations, the associated advantages and disadvantages, and information on data storage processes. The research project did not employ deception, and participants were encouraged to ask questions about any aspect of the study before committing to participate. Participants were advised verbally and through the consent form (see Appendix E) that they could remove themselves and their data at any time until the beginning of data analysis.
Confidentiality	The study collected demographic information from participants through an online questionnaire (see Appendix L) on Qualtrics, which included age, gender, and ethnic background. Participants' personal information was kept confidential on the secure OneDrive of the University of Hertfordshire. Additionally, the researcher anonymised identifiable information from the transcripts and final report. Participants were informed that confidentiality would only be breached if there was concern about their well-being, and in these circumstances, the researcher would discuss concerns with the participant first.

Psychological Considerations	It was anticipated that asking participants to share their experiences of racism could potentially lead to some people feeling distressed. Therefore, participants were informed that they did not have to answer certain questions and could stop the interview if they were uncomfortable. This was particularly important to outline as the interviews were undertaken online, meaning that verbal and social signs of distress may have been less visible to the researcher. In addition, participants were given space to process and reflect in between questions, ensuring they had sufficient time to raise concerns. Participants were also fully debriefed after their interviews and given details of specific mental health services should they need additional support. Researchers were not exempt from experiencing distress from engaging in research covering sensitive topics, which can influence the data collection, interpretation, and dissemination of the results (Elmir et al., 2011). Therefore, the researcher cared for himself by journaling and using peer support for reflection (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Fahie, 2014).

Procedure

Once participants agreed to take part in the study, they were sent an email with a consent form and an encrypted calendar link to book their online interview slot via Zoom. The email also included a link to the demographic questionnaire on Qualtrics, which, on completion, was saved and stored on the University of Hertfordshire OneDrive. Before the interview began, verbal consent was acquired to record the interview, and participants were reminded about their rights, including their right to withdraw, take breaks, and skip questions. The interviews ranged between 50 and 90 minutes, and after the interview, participants received a debrief form, including mental health support services. Then, Zoom transcripts were manually checked against the audio file to ensure accuracy. The transcripts were then analysed using NVivo 12.

Data Analysis

The research study used an inductive RTA approach following the six phases, facilitating a reflexive and innovative approach to data analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2021). The researcher interpreted the participants' accounts from their lived experiences but ensured that their narratives were central to the analysis. Subsequently, the analysis weaved together the researchers' understanding and insights into the cohesive accounts of participants. Table 10 summarises how these phases were navigated in the research.

Table 10

Phases of RTA

Phases of RTA	Process
Familiarisation with Data	Initially, audio recordings were listened to with the downloaded autogenerated Zoom transcripts to ensure transcripts were accurate. This highlighted some moments where certain words were missed. Reading over the transcripts repeatedly helped me to become familiar with my data. I journaled my thoughts and emotional responses to the data during this phase. In addition, I reflected on specific aspects that sparked my interest and noted my observations regarding non-verbal communication. This process was informed by critically questioning my reasoning for these reactions and observations, which helped me to explore my interpretation of the data on a deeper level.
Coding the data	This phase involved uploading transcripts onto the coding software NVivo 12 and coding the data line by line. I could connect with participants' voices better when I had the research question in front of me whilst coding, enabling me to code inclusively, expansively, and systematically. During this process, I could identify and note down aspects of the participants' accounts relevant to the research question. For instance, where footballers described experiences of racial trauma. These initial codes were predominantly descriptive, capturing the surface-level content of experiences. To ensure reflexivity, I journaled my thoughts and observations throughout this process. In addition, two independent researchers coded the data, and initial codes were discussed in supervision, facilitating reflective discourse and different perspectives (see Appendix G for a coding example).
Generating Initial Themes	Once there was agreement on codes, I tried to identify themes from the coded dataset, which involved me looking for parallels and distinctions across the different transcripts. Similarly to the previous phase, I kept the research question in front of me to support this process. This helped me to think about the overall story of the data. I also generated themes separately by referring to the Racial Trauma Framework (Williams et al., 2018), which was compared and combined with the deductive themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In addition, keeping a reflective journal enabled me to consider participant narratives in greater depth (see Appendix A). Please also see Appendix H for an example of how initial themes were generated.
Reviewing and Developing Themes	Initial themes were established from the transcripts as patterns of meaning recognised across participant narratives and through the lens of the DSM-5 Racial Trauma Framework (Williams et al., 2018). NVivo was used to arrange the preliminary list of themes, and these themes were refined and consolidated by engaging with the data on a deeper level. During this process, I engaged in critical reflection by questioning the quality of themes. My assessment of theme quality was informed by considering the boundaries and rationality of each theme and evaluating the quality of meaningful data that supported identified themes. I also considered whether the theme included a diverse range of accounts. This was also supplemented by discussions in supervision, which facilitated discourse in which concepts were investigated, contested, and reflected upon. These approaches ensured theme development was comprehensive.

Refining, Defining, and Naming Themes	Within this phase, I combined data-driven themes with themes developed through theory, and I used short descriptions to summarise the essence of each theme. This phase also involved latent-level meaning-making, ensuring that the process of refining themes and drawing overarching conclusions from the analysis was thorough and detailed. Moreover, I used my reflective journal to understand how knowledge was constructed by understanding the link between data analysis and my lived experiences. This helped me stay mindful of the perceptions and biases I brought to the study.
Producing the report	I combined inductive and deductive interpretations to present a coherent narrative in this final stage. This involved sequencing themes, choosing examples from personal accounts that effectively demonstrated the theme, and relating them to relevant theory. Moreover, I deepened my data analysis by referring back to the research question, previous research, and the wider context to ensure coherence with the study's objectives. This meant, at times, I had to remove or alter components that no longer meaningfully influenced the analysis.

Quality Appraisal

Appraising the quality of research methodology through critically examining processes, outcomes, and conclusions drawn from the study is important to ensure that best practices are upheld (Majid & Vanstone, 2018). The Eight Big Tent Quality Appraisal was used in the current study because it allows the researcher to flexibly and comprehensively evaluate the quality of the research (Tracy, 2010). The checklist covers eight components: worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010). Table 11 demonstrates how the current study methodology met the criteria.

Table 11

The Eight Big Tent Quality Appraisal

Criteria	Study Application
Worthy Topic	The current study is a valuable topic because football has a significant global social impact, making it an ideal platform for exploring critical social issues like racism and discrimination. The study of footballers' experiences of racial trauma in football is a largely unexplored area of research, and research has predominantly prioritised quantitative methods and neglected deeper exploration into mental health concerns. This study is also important because it may help to inform methods to better support players' well-being. Lastly, exploring the experiences of racial trauma in football can facilitate wider discourse on equality and inclusion in society, providing insights into systemic racism and supporting efforts to address inequalities in sports.

Rich Rigour	Richness in data was achieved by engaging participants in interviews, enabling an in-depth understanding of racially traumatic experiences in participants. The interview schedule was informed by a professional consultant and a research team of three members. The purposive sampling strategy meant that the study population included participants with a wide range of relevant experience to the topic. The study also employed thorough qualitative research methods, including RTA. This approach encompassed data collection processes that incorporated quotes from participants who highlighted experiences of racial trauma. In addition, it included contextual data, giving meaning to the wider socio-cultural context linked to these experiences. A reflexive journal was kept to remain mindful of how the data interacted with the researchers' lived experiences and assumptions. Researcher triangulation was achieved by having two researchers from different ethnic backgrounds with existing experience in coding data involved in this process. Lastly, reflexive conversations took place in supervision, which provided further depth and richness to the dataset.
Sincerity	Efforts were made to ensure the sincerity criteria were met largely by maintaining self-reflexivity, which ensured that data collection, sampling, and the data analytical process were transparent. A key priority was ensuring that during the data analysis phase, the experiences and perspectives of footballers were authentically represented. This was achieved by keeping a reflexive diary and using supervision throughout the process, highlighting my biases and preconceptions. I found this process quite exposing, as it made me aware of how my personal experiences of racism impacted how I interpreted the racial experiences of participants. Reflecting on this was difficult. However, I found the learning invaluable as it better prepared me to consider different perspectives from my own and kept me open-minded. Sampling sincerity was achieved by providing a detailed rationale for deciding who was eligible to take part in the study and how participants were recruited for the study. Finally, I ensured transparency by providing participants with the interview schedule before the interview and being clear about what being a participant in the study meant.
Credibility	This criterion highlights the importance of attaining a thick description, which I tried to achieve by selecting a representative sample. Unfortunately, I encountered obstacles due to the limited number of participants and the over-representation of black African players in my sample. This impacted my ability to capture an array of views and experiences, which restricted the applicability of my findings. Despite this limitation, I achieved my aim of ensuring that the interviews were safe spaces for participants to share their experiences. Moreover, when sharing

	the findings, I incorporated accounts that went against the themes, allowing the reader to make their own interpretations.
Resonance	The study included several strategies to ensure the study resonated with its audience. One method employed was aesthetic merit, which used vivid descriptions when presenting participant narratives. This meant reporting important perceptions, portrayals of emotions, and experiences to immerse the reader in footballers' lived experiences. This was also done by disseminating the results and ensuring that participants' stories were put across in a way that evokes resonance, emotional affect, and curiosity in audiences with and without experiences of racial trauma.
Significant Contribution	The study contributes to extending the understanding of racial trauma in footballers and the intersection between sports, race, and mental health, which has been overlooked in research. The study also provides a platform for future research to replicate the study, focusing on different sports contexts or using methodological modifications. The study results contribute to initiatives and interventions to support the mental health of players impacted by racial trauma. Moreover, it increases understanding of how systemic racism operates in football, helping to inform strategies to enforce positive change, which may also be applied to different sports contexts and the broader society.
Ethical	The research was conducted ethically, as the study obtained approval through the University of Hertfordshire's review board before initiation. Moreover, ethics (informed consent, the right to withdraw, confidentiality, and the study risk) were fully explained verbally and in written forms to protect participants' well-being. Participants were told about measures to protect their identities, such as keeping their data on the University of Hertfordshire secure Onedrive and anonymising it in the write-up. Lastly, reflexivity was a crucial ethical consideration, and continuous work was done to mitigate the impact of my background and biases on the research through regular supervision and using of a reflexive diary.
Meaningful Coherence	This was demonstrated by having clearly defined research questions and aims, which provided a guiding framework for the study. The alignment of the research methodology, data collection strategies, and theories meant that the research question and objectives were appropriately explored. Furthermore, including existing research on racism in sport and racial trauma informed the focus of the research topic and the qualitative approach. Lastly, reflexivity was upheld throughout the study by continually reflecting on my choices and assumptions.

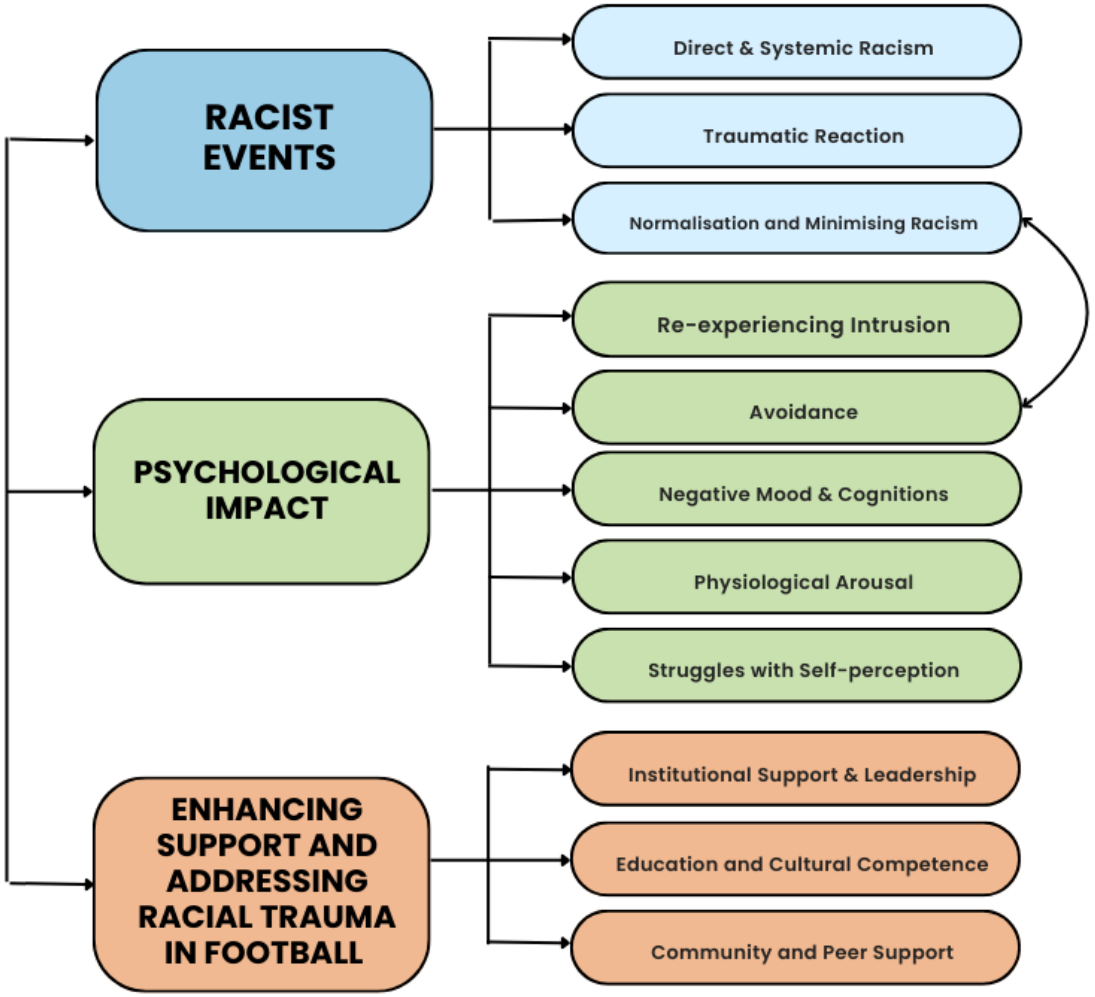
Chapter Four: Results

Overview

A reflexive analysis of the data resulted in three overarching themes and eleven sub-themes depicted by the thematic map (see Figure 4). The analysis was organised using aspects of the DSM-5 Racial Trauma Framework (Williams et al., 2018), focusing on themes such as racist events, psychological impact, and subsequent PTSD symptoms (see Figure 1). Sample quotations support the analytical results and the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Figure 4

Thematic Map of Themes and Sub-themes



Theme 1: Racist Events

This theme provided the context of the racial abuse that contributed to the psychological impact and suggested reforms discussed in the later themes. It includes the sub-themes direct and systemic racism, traumatic reaction, and normalisation and minimisation of racism, which were prominent among all participants.

Sub-theme 1.1: Direct and Systemic Racism

This sub-theme highlighted the different ways participants encountered racism in their careers. For instance, all participants experienced overt racism: “Someone said to me, shut up, you ni**er, or I will break your lips” (Ezekiel). Another participant reflected on the racial abuse he experienced from spectators: “I

remember people pointing and laughing at me" (Denny). Moreover, other participants described being subjected to mass racial threats and actual violence during games:

> I played in a stadium [abroad] with 30,000 people. From the moment we walked out to check the pitch [about an hour and a half before kick-off], the stadium was already full and stayed that way until an hour after the game. People were making monkey chants, and fans were throwing missiles, chairs, lighters, and all sorts of objects onto the pitch (Saul).

> Mate, you know, like goalkeepers come out with their knees up, and he's gone down on my thigh as I've gone up, so I'm on the floor like in pain, and I said to him, 'What the fuck are you doing? You could have broken my leg', and he went, 'Get up, you fucking Arab' (Gerald).

It was also reported that racism took on subtler forms, which highlighted that the participants experienced some systemic inequalities. Many participants felt they needed to exert extraordinary effort to achieve recognition and opportunities like their white teammates. For example, Denny reported, "You've got to be ten times better than the white man, yeah, because if you think you're good, you have nothing because you've got to excel." Additionally, Matthew reflected, "There's always a barrier from a young age. I've always been taught I have to work twice as hard to get the same position as someone who's white.'" Another participant felt discriminated against in squad selections at two separate football teams, which can highlight the persistence of structural barriers. Gerald felt this prejudice resulted in him not being selected as the first-choice goalkeeper.

> My manager thought I was better than him; it was just someone else's personal preference, should we say, not to put me in. That keeper ended up being at that club as well, funny enough, and he was the first choice, and I was the third choice.

This sub-theme focused on the overt abuse, subtle prejudice, and persistent institutional disadvantages that can affect non-white football players' lives. Additionally, it highlighted the challenging circumstances, the significant risks these players faced, and the considerable effort they exerted to obtain equal opportunities.

Sub-theme 1.2: Traumatic Reaction

All participants spoke about their painful reactions to racial abuse. Their stories depicted the initial shock, disbelief, anger, and confusion that preceded these encounters. Furthermore, many of these feelings

happened simultaneously, demonstrating the tremendous influence on their emotional well-being. Saul reflected on his reaction, stating, "When I found out [about the racist comments on social media], I was just annoyed; I got angry a lot. I wasn't very happy in my situation within my football career [due to the ongoing racism and pre-existing mental health difficulties]." Gerald described his feelings of "confusion.” Similarly, Matthew stated: "I was in shock, but I was so focused on the game like a part of me didn't really care."

Despite this, there was a strong theme of trivialising and normalising racism, which was highlighted by most participants using humour at some point during their careers as a way of responding to racism. Matthew remarked, "I found it quite laughable, like people's ignorance to think like that." Similarly, Reece advised, “You have to laugh it off sometimes because if you take it seriously every time, it can just break you." This showed that racist behaviours should be taken in a light-hearted way or as banter. Samuel further said, “They [teammates] said it was just banter. And I just had to laugh. [Teammates would say] You’ve been too sensitive. You've been taking it [racist remarks] too seriously."

Many participants experienced the psychological pain of racism as it occurred, but few participants did not recognise the racist behaviour straight away. As a result, they needed more time to comprehend the seriousness and significance of the discriminating acts, and at times, to get to this point, it led to a process of rumination:

> When I put two and two together and thought, wow, someone could be that shallow, and he didn't even shake hands after the game, so he'd be that shallow and be it go down that route just because you're losing the game of football (Caleb).
>
> > At the time, I didn't even recognise that; that was what it was. You know, I just felt that was just the norm for people to be, you know, acting that way towards me and saying, you know, derogatory things about my race (Ezekiel).

This sub-theme emphasised the deep emotional effects of racial discrimination on participants, showcasing a range of immediate and delayed emotional responses. It also sheds light on how people employed humour as a way to handle distress and understand the seriousness of racist events over time.

Sub-theme 1.3: Normalisation and Minimising Racism

This sub-theme explored the commonality of racism and how participants normalised abuse. For instance, most participants reported that racism was a constant occurrence: "It wasn't uncommon to hear racial slurs that were either said to be derogatory or in jest" (Samuel), and "It was just a constant thing, like every game there would be something" (Saul). Many participants normalised and minimised their experiences of racism. For example, Denny explained, "You have to laugh it off sometimes because if you take it seriously every time, it can just break you." This was also echoed by Gerald, who initially did not acknowledge he had experienced racism and then justified the racist behaviour: "I suffered no racism... actually, I had one kid call me a Malteser head, but he's a little kid."

This sub-theme indicated how common racism was in participants' experiences. In addition, it showed how they downplayed and accepted racism as a way to cope with the emotional burden.

Theme 2: Psychological Impact

The psychological impact theme had five sub-themes, which explored the participants' challenges with re-experiencing, avoidance, negative mood, and cognitions following racial abuse. The impact of racial trauma on physiological arousal and self-perception was also considered. The most prominent sub-themes were avoidance, physiological arousal, and negative mood and cognitions, which were mentioned by the majority of participants. Re-experiencing intrusion and self-perception were also important sub-themes but were discussed by fewer participants.

Sub-theme 2.1: Re-experiencing Intrusion

The participants shared their experiences of recurring intrusions, often triggered by instances of racism. While only a few participants mentioned this, their stories underscored the lasting impact of these intrusions on their thoughts, emotions, and memories beyond the initial event. For instance, Caleb discussed how intrusive thoughts impacted his ability to perform and express himself on the pitch: "It just goes back to me overthinking, me playing simple, me not expressing myself. It's just demoralising." Similarly, Saul mentioned how he struggled with intrusive memories and distressing emotions: "I was very frustrated anyway. They didn't

necessarily get more frustrating. I was just frustrated the whole time. They [the memories of racist comments online] haven't gone away."

Several participants spoke about the difficulty communicating and sharing emotions about racially traumatic events. Ezekiel discussed how he avoided thinking about incidents to prevent them from re-triggering his distress: “There were times before that I couldn't even say the words that I was called out loud, even to myself in private, because you don't need that triggering." Similarly, Samuel reflected on the ongoing emotional discomfort of the intrusive memories by highlighting, “It's even quite difficult for me to speak about.”

The sub-theme emphasised that memories of racism were intrusive and exacerbated difficult feelings, making it hard to move forward. The continuous reminders aggravated emotional distress, which caused participants to hide their emotions.

Sub-theme 2.2: Avoidance

Avoidance links to Sub-theme 1.3 (normalising and minimising racism), which discussed how players minimised and rationalised their experiences to avoid immediate emotional upset and potential confrontation. In contrast, this section focuses on how all participants used different forms of avoidance to cope with racial trauma. This included career transitions, emotional suppression, and avoidance of triggers.

Few participants utilised avoidance behaviours more directly through career transitions to evade harm. Two players spoke extensively about their choice to leave professional football at the height of their abilities, highlighting the substantial influence that racial trauma had on their mental health, leading to serious career decisions: “I played [professional football], and I retired at 23 because of the psychological toll. I definitely had subclinical depression" (Ezekiel), and "Sure, it had an impact, probably even greater, psychologically, but then I decided to walk away before it was too great" (Saul). Saul also elaborated on how constantly facing racial discrimination drained his motivation to keep playing football, which caused him to contemplate retiring multiple times. This continual internal conflict demonstrated a long-term involvement with avoidance to cope with unfavourable experiences.

I'm not in football anymore, so that probably says a lot about how they (racist comments) impacted my ambitions. It was like, Nah, I don’t want to do this anymore because it’s not the industry for me, as in, as

> a player anyway; that thought process was with me throughout the time I was playing, and I started young. This is not completely what I thought it was.

Additionally, avoidance through emotional suppression and internalising stress was common among most participants. Reece encapsulated this sentiment: "I locked it all up inside, so I didn't seek any support or help." In addition, Samuel stated, "It's even quite difficult for me to speak about." Another participant spoke about how avoidance emerged as a way to stop unwanted emotions such as anger from being evoked:

> I know when I get angry, things go really left, so I try to avoid that as much as possible, especially as a kid, because I used to get angry a lot, and really bad things would happen to me. Once someone's got you angry, they've kind of got control of you (Matthew).

Avoiding triggers was another strategy several participants used to manage racial trauma. One participant reflected on their ongoing strategy to avoid situations to avoid potentially harmful encounters: “So I’ve just always learnt to stay as far away from that as possible. Obviously, it’s not always possible, but as much as I can.” (Matthew). Another stated, "There were times before that I couldn't even say the words that I was called out loud, even to myself in private, because you don't need that triggering" (Ezekiel).

In sum, this sub-theme captured three layers of avoidance, which served as coping mechanisms against racial trauma. Sometimes, participants retired from playing professional football, while other participants navigated the pain by suppressing their emotions or avoiding triggers. These accounts emphasised both the acute effects of racial abuse and the long-term mental health consequences.

Sub-theme 2.3: Negative Mood and Cognitions

Racial trauma contributed to a range of negative emotions and cognitive distortions in footballers, affecting their mental health. Many participants discussed this theme, highlighting the prominence of distressing thoughts and feelings as well as harmful coping strategies that accumulated over time. For example, anger was a key emotion shared among participants following encounters with racism: "It used to rile me up; you know, it used to anger me so much. I don't go as far to say they [racist comments] inculcated this hatred in me, but there was a lot of anger in the end" (Ezekiel). Similarly, Matthew shared, "I was heated. I was like,

yeah, because of that, like any chance I get, like whether it's to smash you in or score a goal, I'm going to make sure I take it out in one way or another."

Shame and embarrassment are often combined with the feeling of being othered, resulting in a sensation of emptiness and harmful coping mechanisms. A couple of participants explained how racial trauma led to substance abuse: "Maybe [racism] led them to increase their drinking or substance use as a way of coping with things" (Gerald).

> Mostly shame and embarrassment, you know, of being different or being seen as a quote-unquote 'other.' I had this void, this emptiness inside of me. I turned to alcohol and partying to help numb the perceived pain. Yeah, so obviously, you're trying to numb the pain from your experience, and then you go back onto the training pitch. You can't reach the levels or the standards that you set previously because you know your body, you put poison into your body, and you can't maintain the fine level (Ezekiel).

Participants agreed that the impact of racial abuse was enduring, which resulted in a loss of identity and drove one individual to attempt suicide. Two quotes epitomised this, “It just sticks with you” (Denny). Similarly, Ezekiel stated:

> I did; I left; I retired at 23 because of the psychological toll. I definitely had subclinical depression; in my opinion, I wasn't diagnosed with clinical depression, but I definitely struggled with subclinical depression due to not knowing who I was and my lack of identity. It had a massive effect on me, even to the point where I tried to take my own life because I didn't know who I was. I didn't feel comfortable in my skin, and I felt delicate and void.

This sub-theme indicated the immediate emotional responses and long-term psychological consequences of racial trauma. Players encountered several distressing thoughts and emotions and engaged in harmful coping strategies as a result of racial trauma.

Sub-theme 2.4: Physiological Arousal

Many participants talked about feeling constantly on edge, uneasy, and weary in football environments. They shared stories that highlighted how they were always alert and watchful. Many discussed looking for danger and sometimes feeling the urge to confront it directly. For instance, Caleb mentioned, "Especially being

a fast black winger down in Wales, if you got past someone, I was always expecting in the back of my head, I'm getting stamped, I'm getting swiped out," and "I asked my Welsh teammates, give me all the phrases in Welsh, in case I hear it." Furthermore, another participant shared:

> Me, my good friend and another black player, we would say if anyone racially abused us, we would look for it. So we were always ready for it, almost expecting it. And like I say, you were looking out, scoping out, giving people the death stare. So go on, do it. Do it. And, like, you just waited for words to come out of somebody's mouth on the pitch, and you were almost preempting it (Ezekiel).

For most participants, the anticipation of discrimination often accompanied this heightened arousal, with participants needing to be mentally and physically prepared before games. For the majority of participants, this vigilance resulted in aggressive behaviours as a coping mechanism: "I turned into this horrible person who would dish it back in different ways" (Ezekiel). Another participant echoed this, sharing, "I just wanted to get at him, you know" (Reece). Similarly, Samuel noted, "I thought I was pretty tough; you know what I mean? So I gave it back, and I'm really aggressive back."

However, many participants also discussed that, at times, they adopted defensive behaviours to avoid becoming targets of racial abuse: "I know I have to show a level of resolve to show I'm not going to back down" (Samuel). Similarly, another participant stated, "I do stuff because I don't want to be attacked or to deal with a threat." (Matthew). Many participants adjusted their strategies to navigate expected racial prejudice and hostility. Participants showed this by modifying parts of their game to steer clear of biased officiating and/or racial aggression from opposition players: "Sometimes I might not put 100% into the challenge in case I miss time a challenge, that's me off. That's me done" (Caleb). Another participant noted:

> I became much more aware of my actions. You could even say that my avoidance showed up in how I played—like not trying to dribble past five players to score a goal. That could be seen as a form of avoidance (Matthew).

This heightened arousal sometimes negatively impacted players' ability to maintain focus and perform at their maximum during games and training. The quotes highlighted this: "In a way, it [racial abuse], just like kind of takes you out of your zone" (Saul), and:

> If I do not have a good game, I feel like sometimes the pressure is on me, and sometimes I'd be singled out or blamed [by the manager] for why we might have lost. It just goes back to me overthinking, playing simple, and not expressing myself. It's just demoralising (Caleb).

In summary, this sub-theme captured heightened vigilance and the tactical caution players had to show to avoid racial bias and aggression. Additionally, it recognised that racial trauma increased arousal, which made it difficult for players to perform on the pitch.

Sub-theme 2.5: Struggles with Self-perception

This sub-theme emerged less prominently, with few participants discussing the psychological burden of continuously having to change their identities to fit societal expectations, which impacted their sense of self and mental well-being: "It's like consistent in your mind, you're always having to shift to kind of fit into the space that you are and where you land in the hierarchy" (Saul). Additionally, Ezekiel expressed, "Changing the way I spoke, the way I dressed, or trying not to be seen as your stereotypical black man, I wanted to distance myself." Saul went on to say that the forced adaptation was stressful and undermined his sense of authentic self.

> Yeah, it was a lot like having to mould myself, change myself, and adapt to different environments and situations with people. We have to navigate the world differently. I'd notice even more that I've had to do things differently in terms of other people without consciously knowing.

Some individuals vividly portrayed their struggles with self-acceptance and identity. This deep identity struggle extended to several physical alterations in an attempt to improve self-acceptance and perception. For instance, Gerald discussed changing his name to sound more British to gain opportunities: "[Western name] It's not my real name. I might not get this gig if I say [real name]. I've probably got more chance of saying [Western name]." Similarly, Ezekiel admitted:

> I was pretending to be someone else on the pitch. I disliked my blackness. I disliked my African ancestry to the point where I do things like have my hair straightened and use lightening cream so I could be lighter.

In some participants, racial trauma led to profound internal suffering and mental strain, as individuals felt compelled to hide their authentic selves. The following quotes emphasised this:

> I got to the point where I thought, why am I doing it? This is not it; it is really eating me alive, not being able to be myself. Why am I going to stay in an industry like this? Why do I want to be in a place where I can't be myself? The impact was probably even greater psychologically, but I decided to get away before it got too great (Saul).

> I definitely struggled with subclinical depression due to not knowing who I was and my lack of identity. It had a massive effect on me, even to the point where I tried to take my own life because I didn't know who I was. I didn't feel comfortable in my skin and felt delicate and this void inside me (Ezekiel).

Moreover, some participants mentioned how they hid their true nature by adopting tougher personality traits to protect themselves from racism. Gerald reflected, "I became very arrogant." Ezekiel also shared his experience: "People would say I had a big ego, but it stemmed from all those nasty comments. And that's not me because I know I'm a soft, gentle, mild individual."

These stories emphasised the constant push to conform, the deterioration in true identity, and the deep psychological consequences of such events. This investigation of self-perception showed individuals' adaptive tactics, offering insight into the considerable, continuous obstacles they faced to fit in.

Theme 3: Enhancing Support and Addressing Racial Trauma in Footballers

This theme investigated three areas that participants suggested may minimise racism and better assist players who have experienced racial trauma. The most prominent sub-theme was institutional support and leadership. Education and cultural competence were also widely recognised among participants, while community and peer support, though still important, were the least frequently mentioned.

Sub-theme 3.1: Institutional Support and Leadership

This sub-theme focused on the actions governing bodies and clubs needed to take in order to eradicate racism in football. Most participants felt that stricter penalties were necessary: "Clubs need to be held more accountable, and if you have to do points deductions, that's the only way you're going to get clubs to deal with it and take it seriously" (Samuel). Another participant supported this: "I don't even think banning fans would do

it. I think clubs need to be mindful of people coming into their grounds and saying these sorts of things" (Reece).

A handful of participants mentioned how strong leadership and backing from different levels of football structure was crucial in tackling and eradicating racism: "I think support from governing bodies in your country is a starting point; having support from your club is another thing" (Saul). Matthew further emphasised the need to understand racism on a deeper level to ensure appropriate action is taken: "This has actual impact, but that's the biggest issue really; I think that not enough people really understand it, at senior levels, the level that can have a real impact, particularly in governing bodies."

Few participants linked the perceived ineffective handling of racial issues to the lack of diversity in football governance. They argued that real change is unlikely unless the diversity of those in leadership positions within the industry changes:

> I've been in a lot of these rooms now [with governing bodies], having retired, and it ain't changing. I don't even know whether it is worth fighting because it's very unlikely that it will change unless people in the rooms change. Because they just don't care. If there's no diversity of race or gender, there will be so many issues that people will not care about because it does not affect them. They are not in and around it, so it doesn't affect them, so they are not going to care because they're not going to understand it (Saul).

Participants felt that governing bodies and clubs should be held more responsible for enforcing anti-racist practices. In addition, they believed that strong governance structures and diversity in leadership positions were vital for ensuring that racial issues were understood and effectively handled.

Sub-theme 3.2: Education and Cultural Competence

This sub-theme conveyed the importance of education and cultural competency in minimising racial prejudice in football. Most participants recognised the value of education as a primary measure to reduce racism: "Educating people, making them aware of certain issues and what they can do to prevent it" (Caleb). Furthermore, Samuel added, "I think there needs to be far more education on these things. Like even the subtle stuff." An example of what this involved was also suggested: "Definitely more education on the plight that

black players faced. Really truly understanding, you know what these young players, who are from the black and minority ethnic communities, experience daily" (Ezekiel). However, some participants believed that the effects of education would not be seen for a long time.

> I don't know. It might be a generation or two slowly eking away at educating people before you see a difference. Whether it's ever completely eradicated, I'm not sure. I don't think it will be eradicated in my lifetime (Samuel).

Some participants underlined the importance of educational interventions that specifically targeted perpetrators of racial abuse as a punishment measure. They reiterated the significance of teaching perpetrators about the social and legal ramifications of their behaviour to promote a more educated and respectful community:

> We're gonna go educate them; we're gonna hone in on what this means, why you shouldn't be saying this and the implications of this. If you're in a workplace, you will get sacked; if you're out in the street, you get beaten up. Do people really understand what they're saying? Do they know the meaning and impact of their words? (Gerald).

This sub-theme highlighted the crucial role of education and cultural competency in minimising racial prejudice in football. There was an emphasis on raising awareness about issues that EDC players faced and ensuring that educational efforts were persistent.

Sub-theme 3.3: Community and Peer Support

In this sub-theme, a few participants discussed the importance of collective action and empathetic and safe spaces to aid the effective processing of racial traumas. Participants described the importance of not burdening their families with their experiences and being resilient: "I had to. Mum was already worried about me going up there, so I didn't want to worry her. I did eventually talk to them [family], but at the time, no" (Caleb). Furthermore, Ezekiel explained, "Like parents from the Caribbean and the Windrush generation, that alone. That just shows you just have to be resilient."

Participants agreed that collective support and safe spaces for dialogue and reflection were needed to mitigate the distressing effects of internalised racial trauma. The statement supports this: "If you know other people that are going through it, you could work through it together, and I think it brings mental clarity like

you're not alone because not doing so causes more harm than good" (Caleb). In addition, the emphasis on safe spaces was echoed by Ezekiel: "Having spaces where people can have these discussions where people can speak freely, so they can own their own narratives. You know, those spaces are crucial." Similarly, Denny added what these spaces might offer: "Acknowledging that black players had a lot of barriers placed in front of them."

Community and peer support played an essential part in dealing with racial trauma. Despite a tendency to internalise their difficulties to protect their families and be resilient, they recognised the need for safe spaces for discussion and contemplation. The participants felt these spaces were crucial for allowing footballers to express themselves openly, get validation, and build resilience.

Self-reflexivity

Engaging in this reflexive thematic analysis was quite a personal and challenging journey for me, as it brought up memories and reactions I hadn't realised were within me. Hearing about how participants normalised racism and the emotional load it had on them reminded me of specific scenarios that I had not thought about for a long time. Similar to the participants, there were times when I normalised and trivialised racist experiences without realising how they affected my mental and emotional well-being at the time. Analysing the data seemed strangely like a journey into my history. Nonetheless, this method assisted me in naming feelings and experiences that were hidden from my awareness.

Reflexivity was essential for developing themes and sub-themes for my data. I listened to the audio recordings multiple times in a calm area away from others, allowing me to engage with the participants' stories without distraction. I frequently went to my reflexive diary, which provided another space for my growing ideas and emotions. Supervisory meetings were really useful in improving my methodological approach, offering ideas and external validation that allowed me to critically analyse my conclusions and ensure that I was challenged beyond my initial reflections. My supervisors encouraged me to look deeper into the data, examine alternate interpretations, and incorporate theoretical concepts. Keeping the research question in front of me helped me stay focused during the analysis. Furthermore, colour-coding quotes and organising them into tables to highlight themes aided my capacity to visually represent the participants' lived experiences while also considering the underlying implications.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Chapter Overview

This chapter summarises the key findings based on the research questions and will evaluate them considering relevant theory and research. The last section will include concluding remarks, reflections, clinical implications, and ideas for future research.

Summary of Findings

This study was conducted to address the research gap in understanding the consequences of racial trauma encountered by EDC football players. The research questions are listed below:

1. What are footballers' experiences of racial trauma?
2. How does racial trauma impact the mental health of footballers?
3. What do footballers who experience racial trauma recommend to better support players who experience racial trauma?

Three themes (e.g., racist events, psychological impact, and enhancing support and addressing racial trauma in footballers) were developed from the data and through the use of the DSM-5 Racial Trauma Framework, which includes stages of identifying racist events and assessing racial trauma symptoms. All participants involved in the study faced instances of racism, causing deep emotional distress. Participants described experiences of explicit racial abuse from fans and players as well as more subtle systemic biases, which included biased team selections and officiating. Participants' initial responses varied based on the type of discrimination they were subjected to, but prominent emotions were anger, shock, and depression. Moreover, participants demonstrated a tendency to normalise and minimise racist behaviours to manage their feelings.

The psychological impact theme revealed the intense and long-lasting effects on the mental well-being of the players who had experienced racial trauma. Prominent racial trauma symptoms included avoidance, negative emotions and cognitions, as well as increased arousal. These symptoms impacted players' ability to maintain their level of performance and negatively affected their mental health. Less prominently discussed, but with severe consequences, was how racial trauma also led to conflicts in self-perception in some participants, which led to numerous efforts to adapt their identity to fit the societal norms of the football industry.

Re-experiencing intrusions demonstrated how participants experienced intrusive thoughts, emotions, and memories related to racist encounters and were the least discussed sub-theme.

There was an overall sense of hopelessness about how racism could be eradicated in football, which was highlighted by participants' perceptions of how normalised racism was, the lack of diversity in senior positions, and inadequate punishments against perpetrators. Participants also felt that providing more education about racism was needed to change views and behaviours. Concerning players' needs, several participants felt that safe spaces were needed to encourage open dialogue, self-reflection, and processing of traumas. To further contextualise and examine the findings, themes will be explored with relevant theoretical approaches and existing literature.

This qualitative study addressed the limitations in the existing literature, which primarily focused on self-reported data (Griffith et al., 2021; Kick It Out, 2024), by exploring the lived experiences of racial trauma. It also focused explicitly on player experiences in the UK, which other studies have ignored (Cleland & Cashmore, 2013; Griffith et al., 2021; Van Sterkenburg et al., 2019), and it updates earlier studies by providing insights on current perspectives (Cleland & Cashmore, 2013), which was required as the dynamics of racism in football have changed (Kassimeris et al., 2022). Furthermore, there are a number of key findings that significantly add to the existing literature.

Theme 1: Racist Events

The results showed the widespread and intricate problem of racism faced by male professional football players from EDCs. The study highlighted the prominence of overt and nuanced forms of racism in footballers' experiences, matching the kinds of racist events outlined in the DSM-5 Racial Trauma Framework (Williams et al., 2018). The sub-themes traumatic reaction and normalising and minimising racism featured prominently in the data. These sub-themes found that racism evoked a variety of initial negative feelings, which were typically managed by downplaying these instances.

Direct and Systemic Racism

There were similarities between the racism participants experienced in this study and that highlighted in previous research (Bradbury, 2018; Cleland & Cashmore, 2013; Kick It Out, 2024). Additionally, this study

echoes the concerns raised by previous research by highlighting the persistent challenges and discriminatory practices encountered by players from EDCs in the UK (Kick It Out, 2024).

Traumatic Reaction

Previous research states that people experience different emotions when they are initially confronted with racist behaviour (Swim et al., 2003). Anger and shock were common responses found in both the study and previous research (Carter & Forsyth, 2010; Mellor, 2004). Anxiety, regret, humiliation, sorrow, and shame were also common emotions related to racism found in other studies (Carter & Forsyth, 2010; Pieterse et al., 2012), highlighting the various ways people perceive and cope with racial trauma. Although these other emotions were not frequently mentioned in the current study, the prominence of anger can be interpreted through several lenses. Specifically, the emphasis on toughness in football may mean that showing anger is more accepted as it is more consistent with the norms, whereas expressions of anxiety may be discouraged as they are seen as a sign of weakness in this demographic (Griffin & Armstead, 2020; Pittman, 2011). Furthermore, from a psychological perspective, showing anger might have helped players maintain their self-esteem and sense of control over the demeaning impact of racism (Baumeister et al., 1996).

Normalisation and Minimising Racism

Another commonly used emotional response from this study was the use of humour to minimise the pain of racism, which has been conceptualised as a psychological defence against racism (Williams et al., 2018). Similarly, humour was identified as a coping strategy in the Developmental and Ecological Model of Youth Racial Trauma Framework, which explored racial stress trauma symptoms and coping strategies among people from EDCs (Saleem et al., 2019). This model suggests that humour facilitates distress management against racial trauma but may also contribute to minimising the seriousness of racism. Research studies also demonstrated the strategic role of humour in helping people manage the psychological and social consequences of racism. These studies also acknowledge that using humour as a coping strategy is problematic (Hodson & MacInnis, 2016; Hylton, 2017; Sharpe & Hynes, 2015). One study focused on black football coaches in England and found they used humour to prevent them from feeling embarrassment from racism. (Hylton 2017). The study suggested that humour could offer benefits for well-being and promote interpersonal understanding

and emotional release (Hylton, 2017). These findings indicate that participants may have used humour to allow them to navigate their careers without becoming so overwhelmed by discrimination.

However, this approach also contributed to the perception that racist incidents should be received as banter or taken with a light heart, thus diminishing the seriousness of racism. Therefore, this demonstrates the difficulty that footballers experience dealing with racism while also striving for it to be acknowledged as a significant issue.

Identifying the subtle forms of racism was difficult for some participants, which aligns with previous studies (Beamon, 2022; Lawrence, 2005; Singer, 2005; Spaaij & Schulenkorf, 2014). Williams (2019) suggested that racism may be hard to spot because cultural and structural racism can be deeply embedded in societal structures. On the other hand, Rojas Sosa (2016) discovered that Latin students hesitated to label their encounters as racist due to internalised denial and societal pressures to conform to dominant ideologies. Their hesitation led to challenges in recognising racism, which increased their emotional distress. The results suggest that recognising racism immediately can be challenging due to a mix of misjudging reactions, societal expectations, and cultural influences, leading to delayed acknowledgement and heightened distress (Williams et al., 2019; Rojas Sosa, 2016). These findings resonated with the experiences of several footballers, who took a long time to acknowledge derogatory racist language as racism.

In summary, footballers experienced strong emotional responses to various forms of racism, and humour was a coping strategy that players reverted back to on many occasions to minimise its effects. Additionally, subtle prejudice was a form of racism that players struggled to recognise as it happened, which has been associated with social-cultural influences in football.

Theme 2: Psychological Impact

The current study found that participants faced several racial trauma symptoms, showing that the DSM-5 racial trauma framework resonated strongly with footballers' experiences (Williams et al., 2018). The findings highlighted the prominence of the sub-themes avoidance, negative emotions and cognitions, and physiological arousal, which substantially impacted the mental health of these football players. Although the struggles with self-perception sub-theme were discussed by a few participants, it was prominent because it

severely impacted participants' mental well-being and had strong connections with other important sub-themes. The re-experiencing intrusions sub-theme was the least prominent finding and was omitted from this discussion because it had a limited impact on the overall study conclusions.

Avoidance

Most participants employed avoidance strategies such as emotional suppression and evading triggers, which corroborated the avoidance criteria in the theoretical framework (Williams et al., 2018). Additionally, some participants avoided the impact of racial trauma by retiring from professional football early and avoiding aspects of their usual playing style. This illustrated the profound effects of avoidance on both career and personal life and suggested that career transitions may be an important avoidance strategy.

This finding adds a new dimension to existing sport and racism literature by exploring the intersection of racism and employment, in this case, considering football as a field of employment. Literature in non-sporting settings has, for example, examined how racial trauma experienced in the workplace caused barriers to promotions and professional development in East Asian American women (Wu et al., 2023). However, the impact for some of the footballers in our study was far greater in that the influence of racial trauma led to early retirement and career changes outside of sport. This study offers a fresh perspective by highlighting early retirement from sport as a more drastic avoidance tactic than the typical career changes reported in non-sporting literature.

Participants mentioned adjusting their playing style to avoid perceived biased officiating and racial hostility from opponents. For example, some players avoided making tackles to stop themselves from being sent off, and others avoided dribbling with the ball to avoid being targeted for rough challenges. The participant's use of in-game tactics to manage racism in sports was supported by an Australian study investigating racism in junior sports (Farquharson et al., 2018). Participants in that study normalised their experiences of systemic and cultural racism on the field by avoiding making complaints and not reacting to racist incidents. Similar to the current study, players adapted their behaviours during matches to prevent racism. However, the current results offer a new perspective by highlighting how athletes changed their behaviour and

may change aspects of their playing style to cope with racism. This suggests that racial trauma in footballers can negatively influence performance, which could negatively impact their career trajectory.

Additional support for these findings is provided by a study exploring how referees in Spanish football manage challenging situations such as racial abuse (Devís-Devís et al., 2021). Their findings showed that referees managed verbal abuse from coaches and players by issuing red cards and ignoring insults from spectators. This study focused on referees rather than players, but it matches the current findings by demonstrating ways individuals involved in the football industry adapt their behaviours in matches to reduce the distress caused by racism. The current research adds to existing knowledge by highlighting how individuals may use different strategies to cope with racism in similar contexts.

Participants in the current study shared how they avoided specific feelings and tried not to think about past racist incidents out of fear they could re-trigger difficult emotions. This suggested that these experiences caused ongoing, long-term distress for participants. The use of these types of avoidance behaviours was corroborated by the work of Nadal (2014). The researcher found comparable avoidance behaviours in US college students who had experienced racial microaggressions. The findings highlight how players may exhibit similar avoidance behaviours as non-athletes in particular circumstances.

Negative Mood and Cognition

Another important outcome from the current study was highlighted by the presence of negative feelings and thoughts, which were consistent with research literature and theory. The impact of racial trauma led to many participants having intense feelings, such as anger, shame, and depression, which coincide with ‘negative emotive experiences’ as highlighted in the DSM-5 Racial Trauma Framework (Williams et al., 2018). Experiencing intense emotions led some participants to abuse alcohol, which has been highlighted in research as a common coping strategy for racial trauma (Johnson, 2023; Zapolski et al., 2023). This finding adds to the existing understanding that footballers may use alcohol as a coping mechanism, either to numb emotional pain or to reduce vigilance.

Within this sub-theme, an unexpected finding was that racial trauma had led a participant to attempt suicide, highlighting how consistently being subjected to racism can have severe mental health consequences.

This discovery was unexpected because of the perceived camaraderie within football and the emphasis on being tough and showing resilience, which often overshadows dialogue about mental health. According to the Racial Trauma Framework, racial traumas usually manifest through other stress-based symptoms, which indirectly lead to outcomes such as suicide attempts (Williams et al., 2018). This fits in with the findings of the current study, as participants described how their ongoing challenges with racism led to depression and a lost sense of self, which culminated in attempts to end their lives.

In non-sport literature, the link between racial discrimination and suicidal ideation is well-established, showing that several forms of racism can lead to suicidal ideation among various racial and ethnic groups (O'Keefe et al., 2014; Sutter & Perrin, 2016). However, the link between racism and suicidality in sports is less clear. For example, US studies found that student-athletes from EDCs are at an increased risk of suicide and suicidal ideations (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020; Rao et al., 2015). However, these studies do not establish a causal link between racism and suicide. Thus, this research is an important addition to the existing literature, as it establishes a causal link and highlights the devastating impact of racist abuse, warranting key consideration from sports policymakers.

Struggles with Self-Perception

Participants in this study shared that they felt pressured to conform to white cultural norms to be accepted and gain opportunities within the football industry. Some participants expressed moulding themselves in other ways to fit in, which included speaking and dressing in certain ways, which demonstrated efforts to cope with the distress of racial trauma. These findings support the impact that racial trauma has on self-perception, as highlighted in the psychological impact aspect of the theoretical model (William et al., 2018). However, the specific examples highlighted in this study show the nuances of how racial trauma can manifest in football players.

These findings are also supported by recent sport studies in the US, which highlighted the self-perceptual struggles of athletes who were frequently exposed to racial microaggressions and systemic racism (Cénat, 2022). They reported that athletes followed dominant cultural norms to gain acceptance, which is similar to how players in the current study adapted themselves to gain a sense of belonging in the football

industry. Furthermore, Steinfeldt et al. (2010) found that African American football players suppressed their racial identities in favour of portraying their athletic identities to fit into majority white institutions. This is similar to how participants altered their physical features to suppress their racial identities. Therefore, this study confirms that these issues are also prevalent in UK sport culture.

Another aspect of this sub-theme is related to self and cultural hatred, which several participants admitted to experiencing following being racially abused. This led to them changing their appearance to align more closely with white cultural standards. Participants used skin whitening creams and straightened their hair to make themselves appear more 'white'. This supports the 'skin-tone trauma' concept in non-sport literature, which captures how darker-skinned individuals used bleaching creams to lighten their skin to gain social acceptance (Landor & McNeil Smith, 2019). These appearance-altering behaviours can have lasting negative effects on an individual's psychological well-being and can cause permanent damage to the skin and internal organs (Al-Saleh, 2003; Landor & McNeil Smith, 2019).

The findings demonstrate how the pressure to conform to white cultural standards in football can lead to specific appearance-altering behaviours, which can adversely affect the individual. This link has not been well documented in previous sport research. This issue may reflect broader systemic issues in the sport, which require further research and consideration from sports policymakers. The findings suggest that policies should tackle cultural biases that lead players to use cosmetic products to alter their appearance and champion diversity in sport to enable athletes to feel more valued. These conclusions support the study by Burns et al. (2015), who found that depression and low self-esteem from racial trauma could be reduced when individuals embraced their racial identities. This study suggests that football structures must do more to improve how diversity is perceived to reduce the potentially harmful effects of appearance-altering behaviours.

Physiological Arousal

Most participants constantly monitored their surroundings for potential threats of racism. For instance, players discussed listening out for racial slurs and being hypervigilant of potential attacks. In addition, some players learnt racial slurs in different languages to improve their ability to spot racism when playing football outside of the UK. This relates to the hyperarousal symptoms described in the racial trauma model, which

explains how individuals remain vigilant in case they are confronted with racial abuse (Williams, 2018). Several studies support the findings that increased vigilance from racial discrimination was correlated with mental health disorders (Chae et al., 2021; Doery et al., 2023). These studies demonstrate the distressing effects of hypervigilance and the need to consider this issue in the context of high-pressure environments, such as football.

Furthermore, participants reflected on how experiencing racial trauma led to them becoming more aggressive. This was evident in some players who admitted to tackling racially abusive opponents with excessive force during games and getting into more verbal altercations. These responses can be explained as defensive reactions, which may enhance players' perceived sense of control in potentially threatening situations (Wright & Wachs, 2019). These findings contradict the players' responses to racism reported in the earlier sub-theme (avoidance), where they avoided confrontations rather than actively pursuing them. This highlights that players' responses to racial trauma may vary depending on the situation and, as a result, require further exploration.

In conclusion of this theme, this study found that racial trauma had a strong impact on the mental health of professional footballers. Many participants suppressed their emotions and engaged in avoidance behaviours to reduce the negative effects of racism. Experiencing racism also resulted in poor self-esteem, distressing emotions, appearance-altering behaviours and increased hypervigilance of potential threats.

Theme 3: Enhancing Support and Addressing Racial Trauma in Footballers

A key recommendation from the study was for tougher sanctions for racist behaviour, which is consistent with research (Wojtowicz, 2019). Within this theme, participants proposed suggestions that may help to address the mental health impacts of racism on footballers. Recommendations included creating safe spaces for players experiencing racial trauma and enforcing change in attitudes through education.

Institutional Support and Leadership

Participants in the study urged governing bodies to inflict tougher penalties, such as points deductions, on clubs where racist behaviour occurs. Many participants believed this would encourage clubs to be more

proactive about anti-racism. These findings are supported by Wojtowicz (2019), who also argued for points deductions as well as expulsion from competitions for racism within clubs.

Some participants argued for prioritising punitive approaches, such as education. However, most agreed that punitive measures alone would be ineffective and emphasised the importance of integrating education with punishment. This approach was applied in a study and it was found that adopting these measures contributed to better social and community engagement (Reeves et al., 2014). Their findings supports the views held by participants in the study that comprehensive and holistic measures are needed to combat racism.

Education and Cultural Competence

Participants emphasised the need for anti-racism education for all key actors in football, prioritising teaching on the subtle forms of racism. They believed that this would promote a better understanding of racism and improve inclusivity in football over time. These findings are supported by Cleland and Cashmore (2013), who advocated for anti-racism teachings to focus on topics such as the history of whiteness and classism. These topics are important as they shed light on the implicit influence of hierarchies and biases on race within society. Understanding these topics better could help to reduce the underlying racist views held by football fans and address systemic inequalities (Cleland & Cashmore, 2013). However, resistance from key actors, particularly those in senior positions, may be a barrier to implementing the proposed strategies (Kilvington et al., 2022). This reinforces the study findings as participants were sceptical about change happening because they believed that senior figures do not engage in anti-racism measures. Moreover, other researchers emphasised the importance of education but argued that in order for meaningful change to occur in football, teaching should be delivered to the wider society (Tartak, 2019).

Community and Peer Support

Lastly, participants advised that safe spaces are needed within football to help individuals affected by racial trauma manage their distress. Participants felt these spaces would help them process their negative feelings, reduce isolation, and promote resilience. The importance of safe spaces within football is highlighted in a study which looked at the impact of COVID-19 on Swedish fans (Radmann & Karlén, 2022). They found that collective spaces provided emotional support for fans who were prohibited from attending matches due to

the restrictions. While this study did not focus on racism it proves that these spaces can be implemented within football to good effect to provide collective support, suggesting they could also be beneficial in addressing issues like racism.

Further support for this was provided by a study examining safe spaces in sport for development projects. They concluded that spaces must support athletes' physical, psychological, and socio-cultural needs in order to be beneficial (Spaaij & Schulenkorf, 2014). This is consistent with participants' views about how these safe spaces would function for them. However, another study highlighted the varying effectiveness of safe spaces for gay athletes in football academies (Magrath et al., 2013). They found that the football club structure negatively impacted players' ability to openly express themselves. This suggests that some clubs may need to re-evaluate their structures to ensure that environments provide adequate support for players to engage in discussions about race without fear of repercussions.

Implications and Recommendations

The current study focused on experiences of racial trauma in EDC male professional footballers within a period of increasing awareness and documentation of racism in football at all levels of competition (Kick It Out, 2024). This period is marked by the change in racism in football from overt acts to more systemic forms of prejudice (Kassimeris et al., 2022). Having established how the findings fit existing literature, this section provides several implications and recommendations. The theoretical implications of the findings have been weaved in throughout the main body of the discussion and, therefore, will not be discussed in this section.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Practice in Football

Participants described similarities between their experiences of racism and the ongoing experiences of discrimination highlighted by professional footballers in previous research (Bradbury, 2018; Cleland & Cashmore, 2013). This suggests that current anti-racism efforts in football need to be re-evaluated to understand the reason for the ongoing issues. Research suggests that policies should tackle cultural prejudice in sports and encourage the inclusion of athletes from diverse backgrounds (Burns et al., 2015). This encouragement may alleviate the concerns of racial trauma in athletes (Burns et al., 2015). However, participants were keen to see governing bodies impose stronger sanctions against the affected clubs, which was supported by Wojtowicz

(2019), who highlighted that enforcing these measures would negatively affect the club's success and reputation, making them more willing to follow anti-racism policies.

Participants discussed the need for holistic and comprehensive education to reform how racism is understood and handled in football. Participants specified that education should be focused on increasing knowledge of the different forms of racism and should be delivered to all key actors in football. This should specifically involve education on the historical and social context of racism, which some researchers believe would reduce racism among football fans (Cleland & Cashmore, 2013). A further suggestion was to expand education about racism beyond football communities to the general public, which may help to disrupt the factors that reinforce racist beliefs within football (Tartak, 2019).

Participants in the study expressed that they internalised racism and did not use their support systems to cope with racial trauma. They also experienced difficulties recognising their symptoms, which highlights the importance of raising awareness about footballers' mental health and how to access support (Green et al., 2023). This suggestion is in line with the NHS Long Term Plan, which focuses on enhancing mental health provision, service accessibility, and broadening therapy options for people experiencing significant mental health challenges, such as trauma (NHS England, 2019). Additionally, access to support might be improved if mental health support services are embedded within football structures (Gervis et al., 2019) and key actors are given training on racial trauma to make them more responsive to the needs of affected players.

Participants also emphasised the importance of safe spaces for players impacted by racial trauma. These environments would validate their emotions and give them space to reflect on their trauma with peers. On top of meeting the psychological needs of players, it was recommended that these spaces address players' socio-cultural needs and are delivered in supportive environments (Spaaij & Schulenkorf, 2014). This suggests that these spaces must acknowledge cultural differences among players and provide support for players' specific needs. In addition, spaces need to feel safe enough for players to disclose experiences without fear of repercussions (Spaaij & Schulenkorf, 2014). Ideally, these spaces should be provided within football clubs to ensure they are accessible (Pieterse, 2018). Furthermore, clubs may help by encouraging players to form support networks, making the overall environment feel more supportive and non-judgemental (Davies &

Perkins, 2017). Some researchers also highlighted that measures were needed to ensure that players could report experiences of racism without fear of backlash (Burdsey, 2014).

A final recommendation involves the need to acknowledge the issue of premature retirement that impacted footballers from EDCs who faced racism. Specific programs could be developed to support retired players or those considering early retirement, which could alleviate the impact of racial trauma (Wu et al., 2023). These programs could assist players in finding alternative career paths or provide them with support in their current workplace (Wu et al., 2023).

Implications and Recommendations for Clinical Settings

Experiencing racial trauma led some participants to attempt suicide, abuse substances, and use cosmetic products, which are associated with psychological distress and permanent physical health issues (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). Thus, it is recommended that clinical psychologists receive training in assessing racial trauma symptoms among footballers. The racial trauma framework could be used as a resource to support training and clinical assessments (Williams et al., 2018).

Moreover, football players who have experienced racial trauma should be given several therapy options to meet their individual needs. For example, those struggling with low self-esteem could benefit from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, which helps people manage negative thoughts and emotions related to racial trauma (Pack & Condren, 2014). However, Eye Movement Desensitisation Re-processing therapy could support players experiencing intrusive memories by reducing the emotional distress linked to these traumatic memories (Jones et al., 2014; Shapiro, 1989). In addition, early support should be provided to help players process their traumas, which may potentially help to prevent the severe consequences of racial trauma (Nadal, 2014).

The development of safe spaces was one of the primary recommendations offered by participants to address racial trauma. Clinical psychologists are trained to facilitate these spaces and provide interventions for individuals affected by different types of trauma (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Pieterse, 2018; Wright et al., 2023).

The findings also highlight the need to address the negative self-perceptions of players following racially traumatic encounters. Approaches that focus on acknowledging and celebrating the players' racial backgrounds may help to lessen the need to conform to dominant white cultural standards and foster a more

positive self-image (Burns et al., 2015; Steinfeldt et al., 2010). Clinical psychologists' expertise in self-perception and identity issues means they would be well-placed to help players navigate psychological challenges posed by racial trauma by developing strategies to increase their sense of self-worth (Mitchell, 2015).

Considering performance as a key driver for change, the study findings highlighted that racial trauma negatively impacted players' ability to perform on the pitch. Participants discussed being unfairly blamed for team losses and being targeted for dangerous tackles from opposing players due to their race. As a consequence, players discussed having to simplify their game to avoid these distressing situations, which for some meant avoiding the use of key skills during games, such as dribbling. Making such adjustments can hinder the implementation of the coaches' game plan, impacting individual and team performance. The findings suggest that football clubs and coaches need to acknowledge and address these challenges by assisting players experiencing such challenges.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of the current study is that it uniquely explores the experiences of racial trauma among male professional footballers in the UK and addresses an important global issue of racism in sport. The study builds on existing racism literature, which has mainly focused on quantitative methods and has not explored the personal stories of athletes (Bennett, 2021). More broadly, this research provides a contemporary account and analysis that may inform current discourse and legislation (Cleland & Cashmore, 2013), encouraging efforts to combat racial discrimination.

The use of RTA supports the in-depth exploration of footballers' stories, filling the research gap (Braun & Clarke, 2019a), and it enriches the academic and practical understanding of racism in sport. The next section presents a critical evaluation of the study, focusing on fundamental aspects of the research process, including methodology, study sample, and recruitment.

Methodology

The research aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the mental health implications of racism in UK football provided a strong rationale for using RTA. The structure of RTA provides insider researchers with

space to reflect on their emotions and separate their own perspectives from participants (Braun & Clarke, 2019a, 2021). However, researchers with a strong connection to the study can have difficulty remaining completely objective during the data analysis process (Berger, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2021). Thus, reflexive practices can reduce subjectivity by ensuring that research is transparent and the results fully represent the participants' lived experiences (Nowell et al., 2017). Future research could build on the current study conclusions by employing an IPA approach, which may be ideal for understanding specific experiences of racial trauma that were not fully addressed (Smith, 2011).

Study Sample. The study included eight men, the majority of whom were black Africans. The higher proportion of this sub-group may be due to the higher representation of black players in football, which increases their likelihood of experiencing racism (Cleland & Cashmore, 2013). The over-representation of black African players in the study limits the applicability of the findings beyond this group. Players from other EDCs may experience and respond to racism differently (Hylton et al., 2015). Therefore, future studies should prioritise gathering diverse perspectives to broaden our understanding of how different communities deal with racial trauma in football.

Another limitation of the study was the small sample size, which limits how widely the results can be applied (Hylton et al., 2015). Thus, future study samples should be larger and include more diversity. However, the broad age range of participants was a strength as it captured experiences of racism within different social and historical contexts, which provided insights into how racism has changed over time (Paradies et al., 2015). Future research should continue to prioritise understanding players' experiences from different age groups as it may help to highlight generational disparities in racial trauma among players.

Recruitment. The limited research on professional footballers' experiences of racial trauma prompted the use of several recruitment methods to ensure a wide range of perspectives were captured. For instance, to achieve this, we recruited professionals, semi-professionals and retired players (Cleland & Cashmore, 2013). Additionally, the researcher accessed participants through their pre-existing friendships and used gatekeepers, which successfully brought in all the study participants (Braun & Clarke, 2012). However, this approach was a study limitation as it resulted in certain groups being under-represented and a sample that did not fully capture

the diverse experiences of EDC footballers (Cashmore & Cleland, 2011). For instance, although the study did not exclude female footballers, none were recruited.

One of the challenges we encountered with participants recruited through gatekeepers was the high dropout rate, which could have been due to players' concerns about judgement and privacy. Research suggests that football players may be reluctant to share their stories due to the fear of criticism and negative labels (Hylton et al., 2015). Additionally, football structures encourage athletes to show mental toughness, which may have further discouraged players from engaging in research based on sensitive topics (Bauman, 2015; Hylton et al., 2015).

Furthermore, concerns about privacy and the potential repercussions of sharing stories can discourage people from participating in research (Kirkinis et al., 2018). This was highlighted in a study where survivors of sexual violence were criticised and experienced social exclusion from their communities for discussing their traumas (Schmitt et al., 2021). Similarly, this lack of community support may have been a barrier to some players engaging in this study.

Efforts were also made to reach more participants through social media, as footballers tend to have a big presence on various online platforms (Hylton, 2017). However, this approach did not attract additional participants. This may be due to the potential mistrust players may have in online recruitment methods for sensitive research (Bauman, 2015; Hylton et al., 2015).

Furthermore, we attempted to engage professional football clubs and organisations in recruitment processes to ensure the sample was representative and to increase access to eligible players (Etikan et al., 2016). However, this method was unsuccessful as clubs decided against collaborating on this project despite showing interest in the study's outcomes. Their decision not to engage might have been motivated by concerns about the risk of negative publicity associated with their involvement in a study on controversial topics like racism (Cleland & Cashmore, 2013). Clubs may have been discouraged by the perception that others may see their engagment as an acknowledgement of racism in their organisation, which potentially attracts negative media attention (Hylton et al., 2015). Additionally, clubs may be under pressure to avoid topics like racism to

safeguard their brand reputation and maintain relationships with sponsors (Cashmore & Cleland, 2011; Hylton, 2017).

The obstacles encountered during recruitment underline the importance of building trust with participants, particularly when engaging with individuals from EDCs. Studies indicate that these communities may experience heightened concerns regarding confidentiality and the possible misuse of their data due to exploitation and discrimination in research settings (Rivas‐Drake et al., 2014). As a result, these trust issues can contribute to poor recruitment rates, as participants may doubt the researcher's true intentions and the potential consequences of their participation (Rivas‐Drake et al., 2014).

These recruitment challenges also shed light on the nature of recruiting for sensitive research areas like racial trauma in sport. The use of existing networks and social media highlights an issue in the field, specifically the challenge of connecting with diverse populations who may have legitimate worries about privacy, stigma, and the consequences of their involvement. These obstacles are not unique to this study but represent a wider struggle to accurately include under-represented groups in research (Cashmore & Cleland, 2011). Researchers must balance ensuring representative sampling with recognising the societal and cultural barriers hindering participation. This requires methodological flexibility and in-depth engagement with the communities being researched to develop trust (Schmitt et al., 2021).

Moreover, recruitment difficulties that hinder partnerships with professional organisations highlight the importance of researchers addressing organisations' concerns about public image by emphasising how participation can be beneficial (Conricode, 2020). However, this success depends on the organisations' receptiveness to engage in sensitive research topics and their willingness to prioritise long-term benefits over short-term reputational concerns (Hylton, 2017).

Future Research

Future research could benefit from concentrating on overcoming the present study's constraints by replicating the study with a bigger and more diverse sample. Broadening the study to include more diversity would provide better insight into how different groups experience and manage racial trauma in football. Current knowledge highlights that the psychological consequences of racism differ across ethnic groups and gender

(Harb et al., 2023; Polanco-Roman et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2023). Therefore, it would be useful to see how the results would vary in a sports context and, if so, what the specific variations are. Additionally, future studies should include female professional footballers' perspectives to understand how racial trauma intersects with gender.

Lastly, future research should evaluate interventions provided by clinical psychologists to reduce racial trauma in footballers, such as reflective practice groups. These approaches have been successfully applied in clinical settings and could also be beneficial in football (Greenberg, 2015).

Conclusion

This study addressed an important research gap by exploring the lived experiences of racial trauma among footballers. The study highlighted how racism persists and leads to severe racial trauma symptoms in male professional football players from EDCs. Participants experienced negative emotions, altered self-perception and avoidance strategies. This led to low mood, anxiety, and suicide attempts. The RTA also showed that participants coped with racial trauma by using humour and simplifying their game. Racial trauma also led to deep internal conflicts, which resulted in the use of appearance-altering products to conform to white norms in professional football.

Several recommendations for theory, future practice in football and clinical settings have been proposed. These include implementing comprehensive sanctions for racist acts, providing holistic anti-racism education, and implementing policy reforms. One key clinical practice recommendation was for the need for mental health support services and spaces for safe reflection for players to discuss racial trauma. These initiatives were seen as crucial for supporting the well-being of football players experiencing racial trauma.

Closing Self-reflexivity

I was excited to embark on this research, although there was a lot of uncertainty about what thoughts and feelings it would bring up. I anticipated it would bring up some negative feelings, but I felt quite confident that I could deal with whatever emerged. However, the process turned out to be more challenging than I had imagined, as I was unexpectedly flooded with my old painful memories of racism, which I struggled to stop ruminating about. Moreover, specific participant experiences, such as hearing how some players struggled with

self-hatred and contemplated ending their lives, were examples of things that made me feel hopeless about whether change was possible. This feeling came in waves, and at its strongest, I really doubted my ability to do justice to the participants' stories. In these moments of hopelessness, I was motivated by remembering the courage participants had in sharing their stories despite their discomfort. This enabled me to react more kindly towards myself, which strengthened my desire to continue honouring their stories.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Reflexive Diary Excerpt

Reflections before Interview

Reflections following interviews:
I need to be open going into this interview as I have experienced a lot of racism in my life
Try and explore what they say without thinking about my experiences
I can feel my chest pumping
What is going to come up
What might I react badly too
Will they have the same experiences as me
I hope I can be supportive
Hopefully they don't find it too hard to think about

Reflections after interview:
Wow
This is crazy
Feeling frustrated
Speechless

Appendix B: Recruitment Poster

Appendix C: Prospero Protocol

Systematic review NHS National Institute for Health Research

UNIVERSITY of York
Centre for Reviews and Dissemination

A list of fields that can be edited in an update can be found here

1[.1*Review title.

Give the title of the review in English

A systematic review of the impact of racial trauma on individuals playing sports?

2. Original language title.

For reviews in languages other than English, give the title in the original language. This will be displayed with the English language title.

3. * Anticipated or actual start date.

Give the date the systematic review started or is expected to start.

18/05/2023

4. * Anticipated completion date.

Give the date by which the review is expected to be completed.

07/06/2024

5. * Stage of review at time of this submission.

This field uses answers to initial screening questions. It cannot be edited until after registration.

Tick the boxes to show which review tasks have been started and which have been completed.

Update this field each time any amendments are made to a published record.

The review has not yet started: No

Review stage	Started	Completed
Preliminary searches	Yes	Yes
Piloting of the study selection process	Yes	Yes
Formal screening of search results against eligibility criteria	Yes	Yes
Data extraction	No	No
Risk of bias (quality) assessment	No	No
Data analysis	No	No

Provide any other relevant information about the stage of the review here.

6. * Named contact.

The named contact is the guarantor for the accuracy of the information in the register record. This may be any member of the review team.

Kolawole Osinnowo

Email salutation (e.g. "Dr Smith" or "Joanne") for correspondence:

Kola

7. * Named contact email.

Give the electronic email address of the named contact.

ko21aba@herts.ac.uk

8. Named contact address

Give the full institutional/organisational postal address for the named contact.

University of Hertfordshire, College Ln, Hatfield AL10 9AB

9. Named contact phone number.

Give the telephone number for the named contact, including international dialling code.

10. * Organisational affiliation of the review.

Full title of the organisational affiliations for this review and website address if available. This field may be completed as 'None' if the review is not affiliated to any organisation.

University of Hertfordshire

Organisation web address:

11. * Review team members and their organisational affiliations.

Give the personal details and the organisational affiliations of each member of the review team. Affiliation refers to groups or organisations to which review team members belong. **NOTE: email and country now MUST be entered for each person, unless you are amending a published record. PLEASE USE AN INSTITUTIONAL EMAIL ADDRESS IF POSSIBLE.**

Mr Kolawole Osinnowo. University of Hertfordshire
Dr Claire Jenkin. University of Hertfordshire
Dr Matthew Jewiss. Cambridge University

12. * Funding sources/sponsors.

Details of the individuals, organizations, groups, companies or other legal entities who have funded or sponsored the review.

University of Hertfordshire

Grant number(s)

State the funder, grant or award number and the date of award

13. * Conflicts of interest.

List actual or perceived conflicts of interest (financial or academic).

None

14. Collaborators.

Give the name and affiliation of any individuals or organisations who are working on the review but who are not listed as review team members. **NOTE: email and country must be completed for each person, unless you are amending a published record.**

15. * Review question.

State the review question(s) clearly and precisely. It may be appropriate to break very broad questions down into a series of related more specific questions. Questions may be framed or refined using PI(E)COS or similar where relevant.

What is the impact of racial trauma on individuals playing sports?

16. * Searches.

State the sources that will be searched (e.g. Medline). Give the search dates, and any restrictions (e.g.

language or publication date). Do NOT enter the full search strategy (it may be provided as a link or attachment below.)

CINAHL Plus, EBSCO, Google Scholar, PubMed and Scopus - 18th May 2023 - 30th May 2024

Restrictions

- Must be in English language
- Empirical research

The searches will be rerun just before the analysis, and additional studies will be gathered for inclusion to guarantee the inclusion of the most up-to-date information in the review.

The following search terms were searched for any field for all databases: sport* AND "mental health" AND race OR racism or microaggression

17. URL to search strategy.

Upload a file with your search strategy, or an example of a search strategy for a specific database, (including the keywords) in pdf or word format. In doing so you are consenting to the file being made publicly accessible. Or provide a URL or link to the strategy. Do NOT provide links to your search **results**.

Alternatively, upload your search strategy to CRD in pdf format. Please note that by doing so you are consenting to the file being made publicly accessible.

Do not make this file publicly available until the review is complete

18. Condition or domain being studied.

Give a short description of the disease, condition or healthcare domain being studied in your systematic review.

The systematic review attempts to uncover the impact of racial trauma on individuals playing sport. Sport refers to playing at either amateur, semi-professional or professional level.

19.Participants/population.

Specify the participants or populations being studied in the review. The preferred format includes details of both inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion - Adults (over 18 years of age) and adolescents (under 18) currently playing amateur, semi-professional or professional sports who have experienced racism in a sports context.

Exclusion - Non-sport playing individuals who have not experienced racism in the a sports context.

20. Intervention(s), exposure(s).

Give full and clear descriptions or definitions of the interventions or the exposures to be reviewed. The preferred format includes details of both inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The review will aim to understand how racial trauma impacts the psychological and emotional well-being individuals playing sports.

21. Comparator(s)/control.

Where relevant, give details of the alternatives against which the intervention/exposure will be compared (e.g. another intervention or a non-exposed control group). The preferred format includes details of both inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Not applicable.

22. * Types of study to be included

Give details of the study designs (e.g. RCT) that are eligible for inclusion in the review. The preferred format includes both inclusion and exclusion criteria. If there are no restrictions on the types of study, this should be stated.

We will include qualitative studies to examine the impact that racial trauma has on individuals playing sports. We will use quantitative data (including cross-sectional data) to support or challenge themes.

23. Context.

Give summary details of the setting or other relevant characteristics, which help define the inclusion or exclusion criteria.

24. Outcome(s).

Give the pre-specified main (most important) outcomes of the review, including details of how the outcome is defined and measured and when these measurement are made, if these are part of the review inclusion criteria.

The review aims to synthesise the findings from multiple qualitative studies to answer the question about the impact that racial trauma has on individuals playing sports. The review will provide details about the psychological, emotional and behavioural factors that impact sport-playing individuals who have experienced racial trauma.

Measures of effect

Please specify the effect measure(s) for you main outcome(s) e.g. relative risks, odds ratios, risk difference, and/or 'number needed to treat.

25. * Additional outcome(s).

List the pre-specified additional outcomes of the review, with a similar level of detail to that required for main outcomes. Where there are no additional outcomes please state 'None' or 'Not applicable' as appropriate to the review None

Measures of effect

Please specify the effect measure(s) for you additional outcome(s) e.g. relative risks, odds ratios, risk difference, and/or 'number needed to treat.

26. * Data extraction (selection and coding).

Describe how studies will be selected for inclusion. State what data will be extracted or obtained. State how this will be done and recorded.

Study Selection

- Two reviewers will be applying eligibility criteria and selecting studies for inclusion in the systematic review. The reviewers will independently screen records for inclusion and the researchers will be researchers will be blinded to each other's decisions.

- Disagreements between judgements will be resolved through a third reviewer.

- Software system - Covidence

Data Extraction
Country
Aims of study

Ethics – how ethical issues were addressed

Study setting

Theoretical background of study

Sampling approach

Participant characteristics

Data collection methods Data

analysis approach

Key themes identified in the study (1st order interpretations) Data

extracts related to the key themes

Author explanations of the key themes (2nd order interpretations)

Recommendations made by authors

Assessment of study quality

Data will be extracted by one researcher and will be checked="checked" value="1" by another. Disagreements will be resolved through a third reviewer.

Missing data will be clearly reported, although the systematic review will use a narrative synthesis which involves summarising and qualitatively analysing the available evidence without statistical pooling.

Data will be recorded using Covidence, and data may be extracted in other formats, such as Excel.

27. * Risk of bias (quality) assessment.

State which characteristics of the studies will be assessed and/or any formal risk of bias/quality assessment tools that will be used.

The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) is designed to assess the methodological quality of mixed methods studies. The MMAT assesses studies based on five categories or criteria, each corresponding to a specific research design. - Qualitative Research, Quantitative research, Mixed Methods (Integration), Mixed Methods (Data Analysis) and Mixed Methods (Inference).

MMAT is designed to assess the study's overall methodological rigor, appropriateness, and transparency.

The information obtained from MMAT assessments can then be integrated into the synthesis process to support the following:

- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of each study included in a mixed methods review
- Contextualise study findings
- Assess the integration of qualitative and quantitative components in mixed methods studies
- Provide a structured way to consider methodological considerations when interpreting and synthesising study findings
- Identify patterns and themes related to methodological quality across the included studies

Two reviewers will be involved in the quality assessment.

Disagreements will be resolved by a third reviewer.

28. Strategy for data synthesis.

Describe the methods you plan to use to synthesise data. This **must not be generic text** but should be **specific to your review** and describe how the proposed approach will be applied to your data. If meta-analysis is planned, describe the models to be used, methods to explore statistical heterogeneity, and software package to be used.

The data will be synthesised using a thematic analysis through NVIVO. We will conduct a thorough review of the selected studies and identify key themes or concepts related to racial trauma in individuals playing sports. We will start with open coding to capture a diverse range of themes without predetermined categories. Assign codes to segments of text that represent different aspects of racial trauma experiences in sports.

We will consider grouping similar codes together to form preliminary themes. The themes will take into consideration the multifaceted dimensions of emotional, psychological, and social aspects inherent in racial trauma. We will review the preliminary themes, ensuring they accurately represent the content of the

studies. Each theme will be precisely defined and named based on the shared meaning encapsulated by the codes it comprises

The exploration will extend to understanding the relationships between themes. This will examine how themes are interconnected and whether specific themes emerge consistently across studies.

In the organisational phase, overarching categories will be formulated to unite related themes. These categories will serve as higher-level groupings, encapsulating sets of interrelated themes, thus establishing a hierarchical structure within the synthesis.

To guide the synthesis process, a comprehensive coding framework will be developed, outlining the categories and themes. This framework will be a navigational tool for organising and synthesising data across the selected studies.

Studies will be strategically placed within categories based on the identified themes, ensuring alignment with the content they contribute. This categorisation will enhance the clarity and coherence of the thematic synthesis.

Cross-verification of the grouping of studies with the original data will be undertaken to ensure the accuracy and fidelity of the thematic organisation. Moreover, a member of the research team will review the synthesised themes and categories to increase validity.

We will allocate specific sections or subsections to individual themes, ensuring a comprehensive examination of each theme through in-depth discussions supported by evidence extracted from the included studies. Incorporate direct quotes or excerpts from these studies to illustrate and exemplify the thematic content vividly.

29. * Analysis of subgroups or subsets.

State any planned investigation of ‘subgroups’. Be clear and specific about which type of study or participant will be included in each group or covariate investigated. State the planned analytic approach.

Sport professionals who have

experienced racism in a sports context

Participants can engage in sports from

amateur to professional level

Participants can be male or female

No age restrictions

30. * Type and method of review.

Select the type of review, review method and health area from the lists below.

Type of review Cost
effectiveness No

Diagnostic No

Epidemiologic No

Individual patient data (IPD) meta-analysis No

Intervention No

Living systematic review No

Meta-analysis No

Methodology No

Narrative synthesis No

Network meta-analysis No

Pre-clinical No

Prevention No

Prognostic No

Prospective meta-analysis (PMA) No

Review of reviews No

Service delivery No

Synthesis of qualitative studies No

Systematic review Yes

Other No

Health area of the review

Alcohol/substance misuse/abuse No

Blood and immune system No

Cancer No

Cardiovascular No

Care of the elderly No

Child health No

Complementary therapies No

COVID-19
No

Crime and justice No

Dental No

Digestive system No

Ear, nose and throat No

Education No

Endocrine and metabolic disorders No

Eye disorders No

General interest No

Genetics No

Health inequalities/health equity

No

Infections and infestations No

International development No

Mental health and behavioural conditions Yes

Musculoskeletal No

Neurological No

Nursing No

Obstetrics and gynaecology No

Oral health No

Palliative care No

Perioperative care No

Physiotherapy No

Pregnancy and childbirth No

Public health (including social determinants of health) No

Rehabilitation No

Respiratory disorders No

Service delivery No

Skin disorders No

Social care

No

Surgery No

Tropical Medicine No

Urological No

Wounds, injuries and accidents No

Violence and abuse No

31. Language.

Select each language individually to add it to the list below, use the bin icon to remove any added in error.

English

There is not an English language summary

32. * Country.

Select the country in which the review is being carried out. For multi-national collaborations select all the countries involved.

England

33. Other registration details.

Name any other organisation where the systematic review title or protocol is registered (e.g. Campbell, or The Joanna Briggs Institute) together with any unique identification number assigned by them. If extracted data will be stored and made available through a repository such as the Systematic Review Data Repository (SRDR), details and a link should be included here. If none, leave blank.

34. Reference and/or URL for published protocol.

If the protocol for this review is published provide details (authors, title and journal details, preferably in Vancouver format)

Add web link to the published protocol.

Or, upload your published protocol here in pdf format. Note that the upload will be publicly accessible.

No I do not make this file publicly available until the review is complete

Please note that the information required in the PROSPERO registration form must be completed in full even if access to a protocol is given.

35. Dissemination plans.

Do you intend to publish the review on completion?

Yes

Give brief details of plans for communicating review findings.?

36. Keywords.

Give words or phrases that best describe the review. Separate keywords with a semicolon or new line. Keywords help PROSPERO users find your review (keywords do not appear in the public record but are included in searches). Be as specific and precise as possible. Avoid acronyms and abbreviations unless these are in wide use.

37. Details of any existing review of the same topic by the same authors.

If you are registering an update of an existing review give details of the earlier versions and include a full bibliographic reference, if available.

38. * Current review status.

Update review status when the review is completed and when it is published.New registrations must be ongoing so this field is not editable for initial submission.

Please provide anticipated publication date

Review_Ongoing

39. Any additional information.

Provide any other information relevant to the registration of this review.

40. Details of final report/publication(s) or preprints if available.

Leave empty until publication details are available OR you have a link to a preprint (NOTE: this field is not editable for initial submission). List authors, title and journal details preferably in Vancouver format.

Give the link to the published review or preprint.

Appendix D: Ethics Approval

University of Hertfordshire UH

HEALTH, SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY ECDA

ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

TO	Kolawole Osinnowo
CC	Dr Claire Jenkin Dr Matthew Jewiss
FROM	Dr Rebecca Knight, Health, Science, Engineering & Technology ECDA Vice-Chair
DATE	17/10/2023

Protocol number: **LMS/PGR/UH/05476**

Title of study: Exploring Racial Trauma Among Footballers

Your application for ethics approval has been accepted and approved with the following conditions by the ECDA for your School and includes work undertaken for this study by the named additional workers below:

Dr Matthew Jewiss

General conditions of approval:

Ethics approval has been granted subject to the standard conditions below:

Permissions: Any necessary permissions for the use of premises/location and accessing participants for your study must be obtained in writing prior to any data collection commencing. Failure to obtain adequate permissions may be considered a breach of this protocol.

External communications: Ensure you quote the UH protocol number and the name of the approving Committee on all paperwork, including recruitment advertisements/online requests, for this study.

Invasive procedures: If your research involves invasive procedures you are required to complete and submit an EC7 Protocol Monitoring Form, and copies of your completed consent paperwork to this ECDA once your study is complete.

Submission: Students must include this Approval Notification with their submission.

Validity:

This approval is valid:

From: 17/10/2023

To: 31/07/2024

Appendix E: Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE
ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ('ETHICS COMMITTEE)

FORM EC3
CONSENT FORM FOR STUDIES INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

I, the undersigned *[please give your name here, in BLOCK CAPITALS]*

……..…
of *[please give contact details here, sufficient to enable the investigator to get in touch with you, such as a postal or email address]*

…..……
hereby freely agree to take part in the study entitled: Exploring Racial Trauma Among Footballers

……..

(UH Protocol number ……)

1 I confirm that I have been given a Participant Information Sheet (a copy of which is attached to this form) giving particulars of the study, including its aim(s), methods and design, the names and contact details of key people and, as appropriate, the risks and potential benefits, how the information collected will be stored and for how long, and any plans for follow-up studies that might involve further approaches to participants. I have also been informed of how my personal information on this form will be stored and for how long. I have been given details of my involvement in the study. I have been told that in the event of any significant change to the aim(s) or design of the study I will be informed, and asked to renew my consent to participate in it.

2 I have been assured that I may withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage or having to give a reason.

3 In giving my consent to participate in this study, I understand that voice, video or photo-recording will take place and I have been informed of how/whether this recording will be transmitted/displayed.

4 I have been given information about the risks of my suffering harm or adverse effects and I agree to complete any required health screening questionnaire in advance of the study. I have been told about the aftercare and support that will be offered to me in the event of this happening, and I have been assured that all such aftercare or support would be provided at no cost to myself. In signing this consent form I accept that medical attention might be sought for me, should circumstances require this.

5 I have been told how information relating to me (data obtained in the course of the study, and data provided by me about myself) will be handled: how it will be kept secure, who will have access to it, and how it will or may be used, including the possibility of anonymised data being deposited in a repository with open access (freely available).

6 I understand that my participation in this study may reveal findings that could indicate that I may require medical advice. In that event, I will be informed and advised to consult my GP and I acknowledge that, following discussion, I may be required by the University to withdraw from the study. If, during the study, evidence comes to light that I may have a pre-existing medical condition that may put others at risk, I

understand that the University will refer me to the appropriate authorities and that I will not be allowed to take any further part in the study.

7 I understand that if there is any revelation of unlawful activity or any indication of non-medical circumstances that would or has put others at risk, the University may refer the matter to the appropriate authorities.

8 I have been told that I may at some time in the future be contacted again in connection with this or another study.

Signature of participant……..…Date……

Signature of (principal) investigator……Date……

Name of (principal) investigator *[in BLOCK CAPITALS please]*

……*Kolawole Osinnowo*……

Appendix F: Excerpt from Interview Transcript

Because there had been this change in me that I can no longer be the victim, when I did experience racism, I think it was less often, when I was a professional, it was less often. For that reason, I would kind of explode if I ever experienced it, because I thought I had put it to bed. You know what I mean? I thought I dealt with this, like it was something that was in the past. So when it did arrive, when I was an older and as a professional, I would take it more seriously. And I would do things that would count against me now, you know, I'm not that person now. But back then, because like I said, I wanted to be this nasty individual, where people would think twice about messing with, you know. There would be a lot of verbal, abuse given back, you know, aggressive gestures, aggressive stances. Just kind of holding your ground and protecting your territory. Yeah, it was different in those later years as a professional. You know, I'd hold my hands up now looking back at myself. I probably didn't deal with it in the best of ways, but like I can say now, it's because I lacked a lot of knowledge. I wasn't as verbally fluent as I am now. I wasn't as articulate as I am now. I wasn't as educated as I am now. I wasn't as much of a well-rounded individual as I am now. So for me, the only thing that I could fall back on at that time was, again, status, you know, status and ego.

Appendix G: Initial Coding

"But then sometimes I feel like I'm the show pony or something. Why do you want to touch my hair?"	**Objectified by teammates X**	**Feels treated as an object rather than a person due to his race**
"just give me the motivation just to work harder, just like I've accepted these things happen and going back to there's no point in me moping or dwelling on it"	Motivation through adversity X	Uses racial adversity as motivation to excel and prove capability
"it just makes me more determined, more determined just to just put, basically to put that middle finger up to society"	Determination from discrimination X	Channels experiences of discrimination into determination

Appendix H: Generating Themes

Delayed emotional response

"I didn't even recognize that, that, that was what it was. You know, I just felt that was just the norm for people to be, you know, acting that way towards me and saying, you know, derogatory thing about my race." XXX	Delayed emotional response	Initially unrecognized racial abuse, perceived as normal behaviour

"But at the time, I didn't even recognize that, that, that was what it was."	Delayed Recognition of Racism	Delay in acknowledging behaviours as racist due to normalization

"it didn't really affect me too much but now we're speaking about it I actually realized that it's actually a thing"	Delayed realization of racism	Recognition of racial issues over time

"I maybe I would handle it differently now than I did then because my love for playing football was all consuming."	Impact on mental health	Reflects on how the passion for football overshadowed the immediate emotional responses to racial incidents, implying long-term mental health implications.

"It's a weird feeling. It's a weird thing to try to explain."	Difficulty articulating experiences	Complex emotions hard to verbalize

Appendix I: Interview Schedule

Introduction:
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study focused on racism experienced by footballers. My name is Kola, and I am a Trainee Clinical Psychologist conducting this research. I want to express my gratitude for your willingness to share your experiences, as your insights will contribute significantly to our understanding of the impact of racism in football.

Purpose of the Study:
The primary objective of this study is to explore the experiences, emotions, and coping strategies related to racism among footballers. Racial trauma is a pressing issue that affects individuals deeply and can manifest in various ways, including emotional, psychological, and even physical distress. By delving into your personal experiences and perspectives, we aim to shed light on this critical issue and potentially contribute to initiatives aimed at addressing and preventing racial trauma in football.

Confidentiality and Informed Consent:
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and your responses will be kept strictly confidential. We will not disclose your identity or any personally identifiable information in any reports or publications. Your involvement in this research will have no impact on your relationships with our institution, your football club, or any affiliated organisations.

Before we proceed, I would like to review the informed consent process. If you have any questions at any point during this interview or if you decide to discontinue your participation, please don't hesitate to let me know. Your comfort, well-being, and autonomy are of utmost importance to us.

Interview Procedure:
This interview will be semi-structured, which means that I have prepared a set of questions and topics to guide our conversation. However, please feel free to share your experiences and thoughts openly. There are no right or wrong answers, and your authentic responses are invaluable to our research.

Recording and Duration:
With your consent, this interview will be recorded to ensure accuracy during transcription. The recording will be stored securely and will only be accessible to myself and my research team. The interview is expected to last approximately 60 minutes.

Questions and Topics:
Throughout this interview, we will discuss various aspects related to racial trauma in football, including but not limited to:

- Personal experiences of racism.
- Emotional and psychological impacts.
- Coping mechanisms and support systems.
- Suggestions for addressing and preventing racism in football.

Participant Rights:
You have the right to decline to answer any questions or to skip any topics that you do not wish to discuss. Your well-being, comfort, and autonomy are our top priorities, and your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

Next Steps:

Following our interview, I will provide you with information on how to access resources or support services if needed. Additionally, I will keep you informed about the progress and findings of this study if you express an interest in staying updated.

Is there anything you would like to ask or clarify before we proceed with the interview?

Research Questions	**Interview Questions**
Warm up questions 2 mins	**1. Can you please start by telling me a bit about yourself, your background, and your football career?** **2. How long have you been involved in football, and what initially drew you to the sport?**
To understand the specific challenges footballers experience when they encounter racial trauma 20 mins	**3. How often have you experienced racism in the context of football?** **4. Can you describe a specific situation where you experienced racism within the context of football, which most impacted your psychological well-being?** Prompts: - Who was the perpetrator? -What happened? -How did it happen? Where did it happen? E.g. social media, on the pitch etc. -Who was there and how did they react? -How many times have you experienced racism? **5. How did this experience make you feel at the time, both emotionally and psychologically?** Prompts: Specific emotions e.g. anger, sadness, anxiety, fear? **6. Did those feelings change afterwards?** ...if yes, how long did it take to change and what were those new feelings? **7. What has been the longer-term impact of this experience on your wellbeing?** **8. Did experiencing racism affect you as an isolated incident, or did it combine with other racism experiences to have a deeper impact on your psychological well-being?** Prompts: - Describe this
To understand the impact of racial trauma	**9. When you hear the phrase “mental health” what does it mean to you?** **10. How has experiencing racism affected your emotional well-being?**

on the psychological well-being of footballers 20 mins	Prompts: Anger; sadness; anxiety; depression; irritability Hypervigilance - Heightened alertness and constant scanning of the environment for potential threats or instances of racism. **11. How has experiencing racism affected your psychological well-being?** Prompts: **Flashbacks:** Re-experiencing or vividly recalling traumatic racial events, which can be distressing. **Intrusive Thoughts:** Persistent and distressing thoughts related to racial trauma experiences. **Nightmares:** Recurrent and distressing dreams related to racial trauma. **Avoidance:** Avoidance of situations, people, or places that may trigger memories or reminders of racial trauma. **Social Withdrawal:** Isolating oneself from social interactions or relationships due to racial stress. **Negative Self-Perception**: Lower self-esteem, self-worth, or self-confidence due to racial trauma. **Memory Problems:** Forgetfulness or difficulty recalling details, often related to racial trauma experiences. **Substance Abuse:** Increased use of alcohol, drugs, or other substances as a way to manage experience. **Self-Harm:** Engaging in self-destructive behaviours or self-harming tendencies. **12. Did you notice any changes in your motivation, concentration or performance on and off the pitch?** Prompts **Physical Symptoms:** **Fatigue:** Experiencing physical and emotional exhaustion due to the stress of racial trauma. **Tension and Muscle Pain:** Muscular tension, headaches, or other physical manifestations of stress. **Sleep Disturbances:** Difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or experiencing restorative sleep.

	Changes in Appetite: Significant changes in eating habits, including overeating or loss of appetite. **Gastrointestinal Symptoms:** Stress-related digestive issues, such as stomach aches or irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). **Social Isolation:** Withdrawal from social activities, friends, or family. Training; matches? **13. How has the experience of racism influenced your overall career in football, including your ambitions and goals?** **14. Have there been moments when you considered leaving football due to the psychological toll of these experiences?**
To understand the coping mechanisms and strategies employed by players to navigate racial trauma in football 8 mins	**15. Were you aware of where you could access support prior to experiencing racism?** **16. Who or what has provided you with support and understanding during difficult times related to your experience of racism in football?** Prompts Who - club, fellow players, union, professionals etc). how did you get this support? Was it offered to you? if none, do you know why this support wasn't available? Why didn't you access support? **If you accessed support...** **was it helpful, and if so, how and why? If not, why not? And what could have been done differently to make this support more useful?** **How important has this support been in helping you manage the impact of racism?**
To provide actionable recommendations for improving support for players that have experienced racial trauma 10 mins	**To be asked only if they didn't receive support and/or if it wasn't helpful.** **17. What support would you have liked to have been offered?** Prompt From Professionals, coaches, teammates, family etc. **18. Based on your experiences and insights, what actionable recommendations would you make to improve support for players dealing with racial trauma within football?** Prompts -What should clubs, players, fans, media, football bodies do?

	19. Are there specific strategies or practices that you believe should be implemented? Prompts -Mechanisms for players to report incidents safely - racism-specific support for footballers - education **20. Is there anything further you would like to add?**

Appendix J: Participant Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

**ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
('ETHICS COMMITTEE')**

FORM EC6: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

1 Title of study

Exploring Experiences of Racism Among Footballers

2 Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a study. Before you decide whether to do so, it is important that you understand the study that is being undertaken and what your involvement will include. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

Do not hesitate to ask us anything that is not clear or for any further information, you would like to help you make your decision. Please do take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. The University's regulation, UPR RE01, 'Studies Involving the Use of Human Participants' can be accessed via this link:

https://www.herts.ac.uk/about-us/governance/university-policies-and-regulations-uprs/uprs
(after accessing this website, scroll down to Letter S where you will find the regulation)

Thank you for reading this.

3 What is the purpose of this study?

The aim of this research study is to understand the impact of racism on the psychological well-being of footballers. We plan to do this by interviewing footballers about their experiences of racism within the game.

4 Do I have to take part?

It is completely up to you whether or not you decide to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. Agreeing to join the study does not mean you must complete it. You are free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason.

5 Are there any age or other restrictions that may prevent me from participating?

All participants must be past or present professional or semi-professional footballers over 18 who belong to racially marginalized groups and have experienced racism within football environments.

6 How long will my part in the study take?

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be interviewed by a researcher from the University of Hertfordshire. The interview will take place via Zoom, which should last up to 60 minutes.

7 What will happen to me if I take part?

Participants will be asked questions pertaining to their lived encounters with racism in football settings and the subsequent effects on their well-being. Additionally, participants will be asked to provide insights into potential enhancements in the provision of support for footballers.

You will also be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire, which will ask you details about your age, gender, ethnic background and your status as a footballer. This is just to ensure you meet the eligibility criteria of the study and to provide some context to your answers in the interview.

8 What are the possible disadvantages, risks or side effects of taking part?

Participants may experience distress, anxiety, or other negative feelings, particularly as the study discusses sensitive subjects such as racism and mental health.

If you are experiencing distress during the study, you are urged to communicate this to the researcher. They can provide you with information and support and may be able to adjust the study procedures or refer you to appropriate support.

As a research participant, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time if you feel uncomfortable or have concerns.

9 What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Participants have the opportunity to share their personal experiences and perspectives, allowing their voices to be heard on a significant issue. This can contribute to raising awareness about racism in football and fostering a more inclusive environment.

Participation may also contribute to the broader goal of combating racism in football. The insights gained from participants can influence the development of anti-racist policies, interventions, and initiatives, fostering positive change in the sport.

10 How will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

The interview will be audio recorded on Zoom and on a separate voice recorder to ensure the accuracy of data collection. This recording will then be transcribed into a written document and stored electronically in a password-protected file on the GDPR-compliant UH One Drive.

Your demographic questionnaire and consent form will also be securely stored on this drive and not shared with anyone else. When the data is discussed in written or verbal reports, it will be anonymized, so your name and football club will not be publicly disclosed. The researcher will use unique study IDs instead of names or aggregating data to ensure that all data is de-identified in any research output.

11 What will happen to the data collected within this study?

The data collected will be stored electronically in a password-protected environment until September 2024, after which time it will be destroyed under secure conditions.

12 Will the data be required for use in further studies?

Your data will not be used in any further studies.

13 Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by the University of Hertfordshire Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority.

The UH protocol number is LMS/SF/UH/04434.

14 Factors that might put others at risk

Please note that if, during the study, any medical conditions or non-medical circumstances, such as unlawful activity, become apparent that might or had put others at risk, the University may refer the matter to the appropriate authorities and, under such circumstances, you will be withdrawn from the study.

15 Who can I contact if I have any questions?

If you would like further information or would like to discuss any details personally, please get in touch with me by email:

Kolawole Osinnowo

Email: ko21aba@herts.ac.uk

Although we hope it is not the case, if you have any complaints or concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please write to the University's Secretary and Registrar at the following address:

Secretary and Registrar
University of Hertfordshire
College Lane
Hatfield
Herts
AL10 9AB

Thank you very much for reading this information and giving consideration to taking part in this study.

Appendix K: Recruitment Email

Exploring Racial Trauma Among Footballers: A Call to Share Your Experiences

I'm Kola Osinnowo, a football enthusiast and a doctoral student at the University of Hertfordshire. I'm contacting you with a unique opportunity close to the heart of the beautiful game we all love. I'm conducting a research study to uncover the intricate experiences of racism in football, and I'd love for you to be a part of this important journey.

I want to understand how these experiences may have affected your psychological wellbeing and also discuss potential recommendations you feel could support current or future players.

I am recruiting individuals who meet all these criteria:

- 18 or over who play professional or semi-professional football or is retired (can be male or female)
- Have lived experience of racism within a football setting
- Self-identifies as belonging to racially marginalised groups

If you meet these criteria, I would be eager to connect and chat. The activities in this research project will include:

- Participating in a one-on-one interview, lasting about 60 minutes virtually on Zoom.
- A discussion about your journey with racism in football. We will also touch base on the coping mechanisms and strategies you employed to navigate this. Feel free to skip any questions that you're not comfortable with – it's all about sharing what feels right for you.

Participating in this project is entirely up to you, and there's no obligation. Your information

will be kept confidential and anonymous throughout the entire process.

If the prospect of contributing to this crucial conversation resonates with you, please contact me at:

Email: Ko21aba@herts.ac.uk

Appendix L: Demographic Questionnaire

Please provide the following demographic information. Your responses will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes.

1. **Full Name:** _____
2. **Email address:** _____
3. **Date of Birth:** _____ (MM/DD/YYYY)
4. **Gender** (please circle):
   - Male
   - Female
   - Non-binary/third gender
   - Prefer not to say
   - Other (please specify): _____
5. **What would best describe your ethnic background?** (please circle)

Asian or Asian British
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Asian background

Black, Black British, Caribbean or African
- Caribbean
- African
- Any other Black, Black British, or Caribbean background

Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other Mixed or multiple ethnic background

White
- English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British
- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Roma

- Any other White background

Other ethnic group

- Arab
- Any other ethnic group

6. **Marital Status** (please circle):

- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Separated
- Domestic partnership
- Prefer not to say

7. **Do you have children?** (please circle)

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

8. **How would you describe your current playing status in football?** (please circle)

- Active professional player
- Active semi-professional player
- Active amateur player
- Retired player
- Inactive due to injury
- Inactive for personal reasons
- Other (please specify): _____

9. **Highest Level of Play** (please circle):

- Semi-Professional
- Professional
- Other (please specify): _____

10. **Years of playing experience: _____ yea**