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[Eduardo Teixeira](#) ^{*}, [Carlos Silva](#) ^{*}, [António Manuel Vicente](#) ^{*}

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Article

Development and Validation of an Interview Guide for Examining the Effects of Sports Careers on the Quality of Life of Retired Portuguese Football Players

Eduardo Teixeira ^{1,3,*}, Carlos Silva ^{1,3} and António Vicente ²

¹ Sport Sciences School of Rio Maior, Polytechnic Institute of Santarém, 2040-413 Rio Maior, Portugal

² Faculty of human and Social Sciences, University of Beira Interior, 6201-001, Covilhã, Portugal

³ Life Quality Research Centre, Polytechnic Institute of Santarém, 2001-902, Santarém, Portugal

* Correspondence: eduardoteixeira@esdrm.ipsantarém.pt; Tel.: +351 924393172.

Abstract: Considering the importance of assessing the impacts resulting from a sport career, this study aimed at developing and validating a semi-structure interview guide suitable for quantifying the socio-demographic and epidemiological profile of former professional football players. Based on the theoretical frameworks and several methodological procedures, an interview guide was developed, consisting of 3 areas of conceptual organization (A1. Biographical data; A2. Career data; and A3. Post-Career Transition data) and 8 data collection categories (C1. Personal data; C2. Professional data; C3. Socio-demographic pathway in the post-career; epidemiological pathway; C4. Epidemiological pathway; C5. Moment of leaving the career; C6. Socio-demographic pathway in post-career; C7. Epidemiological pathway in the post-career; and C8. Perceptions on post-career planning). The construction and validation of the interview guide following 4 steps: Ad hoc construction of the interview guide (step 1); Review of the interview guide by a panel of experts (step 2); Definition of procedures and protocol for the application of the interview (step 3); Application of the pilot study for face validation of the interview guide (step 4). Thus, in procedural terms, four stages were considered for the construction and validation of the interview guide, namely the Ad hoc construction of the interview guide (i), the review of the interview guide by a panel of experts (ii), definition of procedures and protocol for the application of the interview (iii), and the application of the pilot study for the face validation of the interview guide (iv). The results showed that the interview guide for the study of the impacts of the sports careers on the quality of life of Portuguese former football players shows reliability for the collection of qualitative and quantitative information from the respective content analysis. The use of the interview guide characterizes the path of former player, providing information and knowledge on the socio-demographic and epidemiological impact factors resulting from their post-career (sports retirement).

Keywords: football; post-career and well-being; Career impacts; interview

1. Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a significant increase in research focused on understanding the long-term impacts of sports careers [1,2].

Career transition for athletes is a pivotal juncture in their lives, occurring at an early stage compared to individuals in the general population, non-athletes [3,4]. This timing complexity and adds layers of complexity to the process, making it a multidimensional, multilevel, and multifactorial experience [5]. Consequently, there is an urgent imperative to cultivate specialized and interdisciplinary knowledge from various scientific domains to gain insights into a phenomenon that has far-reaching impacts on both society as a whole and individuals. In the realm of football, sports careers are marked by significant physical strain, considering the extensive depletion of motor energy resources [6–8].

Engaging in the sport at the professional level comes with a heightened risk of injury [10–12]. Concurrently, the time constraints of an athlete's career compel them to form a deeper connection

with their profession, encompassing matters like daily availability, the pursuit of enhanced earnings, the sacrifices of social life, dietary habits, and other facets that may not be as conspicuous in non-sporting occupations [13]. In addition to these considerations, football players often assume a role of social prominence, leading to their recognition and characterization through various descriptors. Moreover, this recognition situates them within a limited social circle [13–15].

A career can be defined as a sequential series of behaviors and attitudes tied to an individual's experiences and activities related to their work over the course of their life [16]. It represents a continually evolving process, consisting of distinct stages, each with its specific demands [17,18]. One of these stages is the transition to post-career life. In the context of football, this transition signifies the moment when a player departs from their professional career and enters a new phase of life [18,19]. This situation is particularly delicate as it necessitates the player's emotional adaptation to a new social environment, a different status, and an altered lifestyle [20].

The number of studies in this field, especially in football, is relatively limited. Therefore, it appears pertinent to identify, collect, and disseminate data related to various aspects such as the activity process, professional retirement, sociodemographic realities, health consequences, and longevity influenced by the careers of footballers, guided by existing literature [7,8,21,23]. To gain a more precise understanding of the patterns and requirements of these professionals, it is essential for research to concentrate on the specific sport and, if feasible, facilitate cross-cultural comparisons [1,2]. Building on theoretical models concerning careers and career transitions [17,18,24–27], a research trajectory has emerged with the objective of examining the socio-demographic and epidemiological effects stemming from the professional football career of former players. Taking this viewpoint into consideration and employing qualitative methodology, we have developed and confirmed the validity of a semi-structured interview guide. This approach, in accordance with the perspectives of multiple authors [28–31], is an established research method for acquiring comprehensive insights into participants' experiences, emotions, and interpretations.

Framed within the research paradigm on the theme of careers and sport transitions, specifically oriented towards research on the impacts resulting from the professional football career and its effects on the perception of post-career quality of life, as well as in the pursuit of scientific studies carried out in this area by several authors [15,21,32–35], the main purpose was to build and validate a meta-evaluative instrument, in the form of a checklist, focused on the interpretivist paradigm, capable of characterizing the sociodemographic and epidemiological profile of former football players in Portugal, considering all the transitional phases of the career, namely from the beginning of the professional activity to the situational moment in the post-career.

2. Materials and Methods

Before initiating the construction of this interview guide, the ethical committee at the University of Beira Interior was obtained (CE-UBI-Pj-2021- 015). The quality assurance of an interview for application in the scientific field should respect a set of methodological procedures [31,36,37]. The theoretical framework, the choice of the type of interview, the interview structure definition, the relevance and clarity of the questions, the validation process, the interview training, the interview application and the data processing are some of the steps highlighted in the literature [31,36–39].

Drawing upon the theoretical framework, which is informed by a comprehensive review of the literature concerning the effects of former footballers' professional careers, particularly within sociodemographic and epidemiological dimensions, we meticulously developed a semi-structured interview guide tailored to the research objectives. We opted for a semi-structured interview approach due to its capacity to incorporate relevant theories and hypotheses related to the research theme. This approach not only facilitates the description of social phenomena but also enables their comprehensive explanation and understanding [38,40].

In terms of the procedural aspects, we considered four distinct stages for the creation and validation of the interview guide. These stages encompassed the following: (i) the ad hoc construction of the interview guide, (ii) a critical review of the interview guide by a panel of experts, (iii) the

formulation of procedures and a protocol for administering the interview, and (iv) the execution of a pilot study to assess the face validity of the interview guide.

2.1. *Ad hoc construction of the interview guide*

To begin, we initiated our research process by exploring scientific articles centered about careers and post-career transitions in sports, with a particular emphasis on football. We conducted these searches using relevant keywords within popular search engines. Subsequently, we scrutinized the methodologies employed in both quantitative and qualitative studies that delved into career perspectives and career transitions within a sociodemographic and epidemiological framework. The intention was to utilize this analysis to structure the interview guide into thematic sections, aligning them with the overarching research objectives. This process was informed by insights from various sources [8,12,21,32,39,41,42].

It is widely acknowledged that conceptual research on career transitions should embrace a comprehensive, continuous, and multifaceted approach [19,27,43]. This entails recognizing the unique challenges that athletes face at different stages of their sporting journey, as well as in other aspects of their lives, including their interactions with coaches, parents, and friends [44,45]. Moreover, it necessitates an understanding of the influence of macrosocial factors such as culture, context, and the personal development of the player [46]. With this perspective in mind, the initial version of the interview guide was structured around three distinct areas, drawing support from relevant theoretical models [17,27,47]. Subsequently, after considering insights from various sources [3,7,12,15,21,32,48–55], we made the decision to incorporate eight research categories, each containing numerous questions organized into various subcategories.

Table 1. Areas, categories, and subcategories of the interview guide.

Area 1: Biographical Data	
Category 1: Personal data	Category 2: Professional data
Full name / Sport name	Year of beginning and end of career
Place of birth / Date of birth	Internationalisations / Tactical Position
Academic and thecnical qualifications	Start of federated activity (formation)
Residency (pree-carreer and post-carreer)	Characteristics of professionalisation
Height and Weight (current)	Curriculum vitae summary
Area 2: Professional Career	
Category 3: Sociodemographic Backgroud	Category 4: Epidemiological Pathway
Conciliation of professional activity	Serious Injuries
Years of living outside the área of usual residence	Surgical interventions
Evolution of the family household	Medical-sports monitoring
Family	Experienced training methodologies
Academic and thechnical habilitations	Psychological suport
General socio-economic level	
Area 3: Transition for post-career	
Category 5: Moment of career retirement	Category 6: Post-career sociodemographic pathway
Retirement form	Experiences and adaptations
Causes / reasons for retirement	Professional development
Retirement Dificult decision	Socio-economic level evolution
Retirement planning	Family
Important people in the retirement	Football connection
Category 7: Post-career epidemiological pathway	Category 8: Perceptions of post-career planning
Health problems	Importance of pos-career planning

Medical follow-up (needs)	Knowledge of support programmes
Career impact perceptions	Post-career preparation (suggestions)
Surgical interventions	Career retrospective (significant moments and problematic experiences)

As an initial premise, meticulous attention was given to the wording, structure, and sequence of the questions to ensure that they were framed objectively, in plain language, and without inadvertently suggesting any specific answers [31].

2.2. Evaluation of the interview guide by an expert panel

Following the creation of the initial draft of the interview guide, it underwent a face validation process by a panel of three experts. These experts were experienced higher education teachers with a track record of research and published work in the relevant field [56,57]. After receiving their feedback, several modifications were made to the interview guide. Specifically, eight questions were removed, and the wording of seven other questions was revised, while keeping intact the originally defined categories and subcategories.

2.3. Procedures and protocol for applying the interview

To ensure a thorough and meticulous utilization of the instrument, a set of procedures was established for both its preparation and implementation. This encompassed guidelines for contact and interview preparation, as well as the development of a protocol covering the pre-interview, during-interview, and post-interview phases.

2.4. Execution of the pilot study

To assess the practical effectiveness of the interview, including factors like its flow, duration, question clarity, and any unforeseen issues [58], we conducted a pilot study. The primary objective was to identify any deficiencies, constraints, or shortcomings in the interview structure [30]. The pilot study involved a sample of two retired Portuguese football players, each having accumulated over eight years of professional experience.

Table 2. Characterization of the interviewed individuals for the pilot study.

	Former player 1	Former Player 2
Career time	1983-1999	1982-1993
Tactical position	Midfielder	Defense
Competitive level	Level 1 (first division)	Level 2 (second division)

Due to the constraints posed by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the interviews were conducted via videoconference, utilizing platforms like Zoom. This approach was chosen to maintain a desirable level of comfort for the interviewees [31,36]. It allowed them to participate from the comfort of their own environment while interacting with the interviewer in a quiet, confidential setting and having easy access to the interview guide. On average, the interviews lasted approximately forty-two minutes, which was considered an appropriate duration for field application. Additionally, this phase served as a training opportunity for the interviewer, helping to assess the relevance of the topics covered and evaluate the clarity of the questions to eliminate any potential comprehension issues [49]. In conclusion, the final version of the interview guide comprises three main areas and eight categories, encompassing a total of thirty questions.

2.4.1. Interviews transcription

The interviews were recorded in audio and video format and transcribed. The QSR International – Nvivo, version 11.0 software was used for the information analysis and precessing, [59,60].

2.4.2. Content analysis of the interviews.

Content analysis is a well-established qualitative research method used to interpret the meaning within textual content, aligning with the naturalistic paradigm [61]. The validation of the interviews was conducted through conventional content analysis, wherein coding areas and categories were directly derived from the textual data. This approach aimed to extract meaning from the transcribed content by organizing it into discrete sections of information, each identified by specific codes [28]. By employing this method, we ensured the validation of the discourse by the individuals providing the information and upheld the quality of the procedural dialogue inherent in the interview technique [30,58].

To define the codes for presenting and discussing the results, we analyzed phrases, expressions, and recurring ideas common among the selected interviewees. This process helped identify thematic categories and subcategories based on the interview protocol and the primary topics addressed during the interviews. Subsequently, a review of the initial structure of these categories and subcategories was undertaken, incorporating new criteria as additional response options emerged. This approach aligns with recommendations from other authors [59] for a mixed methodology that simultaneously utilizes pre-defined categories and adapts to new subcategories that best suit the analyzed material.

3. Results and Discussion

The methodology employed, stemming from the content analysis conducted during the research, involved constructing a comprehensive matrix of responses for each of the categories outlined in the guide. This matrix facilitated the identification of all the subcategories and criteria that emerged. Subsequently, these findings were discussed in the context of the theoretical framework pertaining to careers and sports transitions.

3.1. Biographical data (Area 1)

The collection of informative biographical data is common practice among several retrospective studies [12,14,15,21,51,52]. In this regard, and firstly, through closed questions, the personal data of the former players were collected (Figure 1).

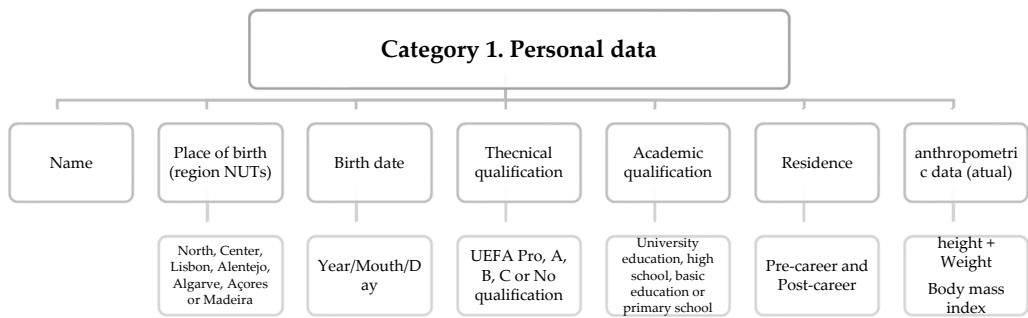


Figure 1. Matrix containing codes for personal information.

Both closed and open-ended questions were employed to enable the subsequent determination of dependent and independent variables based on the objectives and research questions posed in scientific studies. This approach aimed to enhance the identification and characterization of former players in relation to their professional careers. (Figure 2).

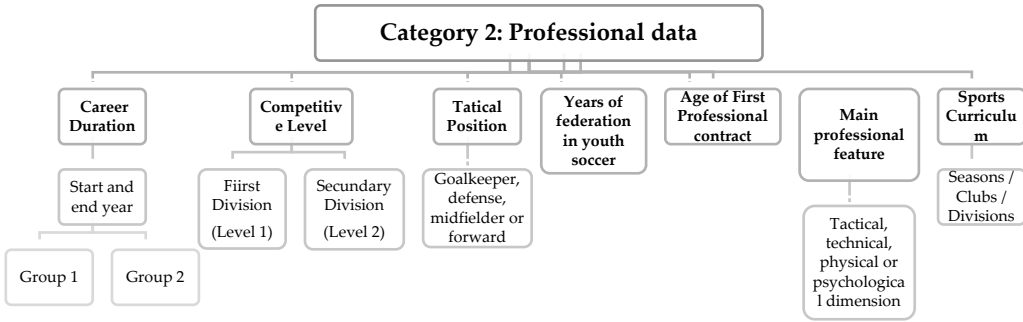


Figure 2. Matrix containing response codes related to the career trajectory.

The analyzed content revealed that the responses led to a distinct identification of the criteria for each of the subcategories. The interviewees displayed clarity in their understanding of the questions posed to them, facilitating the interpretation of each subcategory during the transcription of the interviews.

3.2. Professional Career (Area 2)

The domain of professional careers encompasses two categories, each providing retrospective information about the sociodemographic and epidemiological aspects of former football players' careers. These categories aim to elucidate the unique attributes of football players' careers, particularly within a systems perspective, which will be analyzed in the context of sports psychology. [1]. From the career models proposed by Stambulova [26] we opted for the guideline of the structural model, i.e. to develop questions that could originate data concerning the direction of sport development (e.g., motivation, quality and style) and, simultaneously, of the psychological determinants reflecting aspects of operational (e.g., psychological processes triggered), situational (e.g., activities and behaviours) and cultural (e.g., organisation and lifestyle) scope.

Through the content analysis of interviews pertaining to category 3, which is focused on the sociodemographic aspect, six distinct criteria have emerged as crucial for exploring and gathering information. These criteria include the ability to balance professional commitments, the duration of time spent away from one's native area of residence, changes in family dynamics, the pursuit of academic or technical education, and the perceived socio-economic status achieved during the career. These criteria are visually represented in Figure 3.

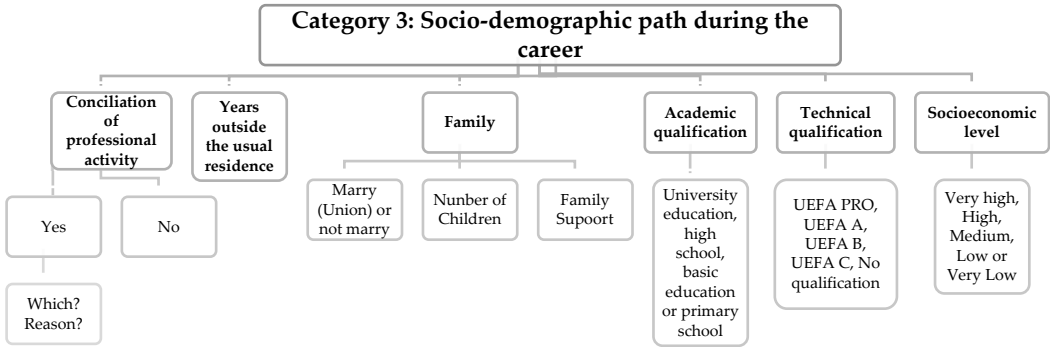


Figure 3. Matrix with response codes regarding the socio-demographic path during the career.

Regarding the content analysis of interviews in category 4 (see Figure 4), we have identified and grouped five subcriteria for extracting relevant information. These subcriteria were designed to

collect data concerning the occurrence of significant injuries, any surgeries undergone, assessments of the quality of sports medical care, opinions on methodological experiences, and the availability of psychological support during the players' careers. These criteria are aimed at investigating whether health issues experienced during the professional career are indeed factors that should be considered in assessing the quality of life for individuals' post-career. This aligns with findings from previous research studies [32,34,41].

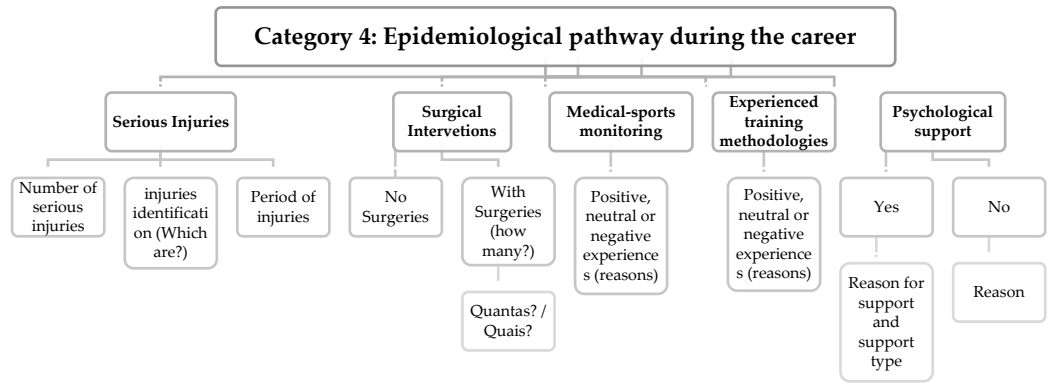


Figure 4. Matrix with response codes regarding the epidemiological pathway during the career.

Content analysis shows that there is agreement between the researchers in identifying the number and type of injuries that former players considered to be serious during their career. A similar pattern emerges concerning both the quantity and nature of surgeries undertaken, alongside the recognition of the presence of psychological support. The findings suggest that it could be valuable to categorize timeframes during which injuries and surgeries occurred. Regarding the perceptions of sports medical care and the methodologies encountered, coding presented challenges because former players indicated having diverse practices and experiences throughout their careers. This diversity arose from interactions with different medical departments and technical teams, which naturally influenced their perceptions of the quality of experiences. To address this issue and ensure more straightforward coding, both questions should initially be structured with closed-answer options. In other words, former players should assess these criteria as positive, neutral, or negative when considering their entire career trajectory. Subsequently, in a follow-up open-ended question, they can provide justifications and explanations for their choices.

3.3. Transition to Post-Career (Area 3)

The category addressing the termination of a sports career drew inspiration from two key models: the conceptual model of adaptation to retirement among athletes [27] and the Sport Career Transition model [24]. The questions posed inquired, from a comprehensive standpoint, about the variables that either influence or are associated with the professional career retirement process.

Through the results obtained (Figure 5), it seems that the contents of the answers present informative assumptions capable of inferring about the quality of the transition experienced by former players and, concomitantly, to understand which resources were used for this transition, which results in the effective identification of dependent variables that define the conclusion of the careers within this population [21,64]. The factors that determinate the quality of the transition to post-career are the voluntariness (or involuntariness) of the retirement, the time of acceptance, the athletic identity, the new professional orientation, and the life changes that arise at the moment of retirement. On the other hand, and in relation to the resources used for this transition, the existence of coping strategies, the type of psychological support, the existence (or not) of a career retirement plan and also the use (or not) of support from programs are highlighted [21].

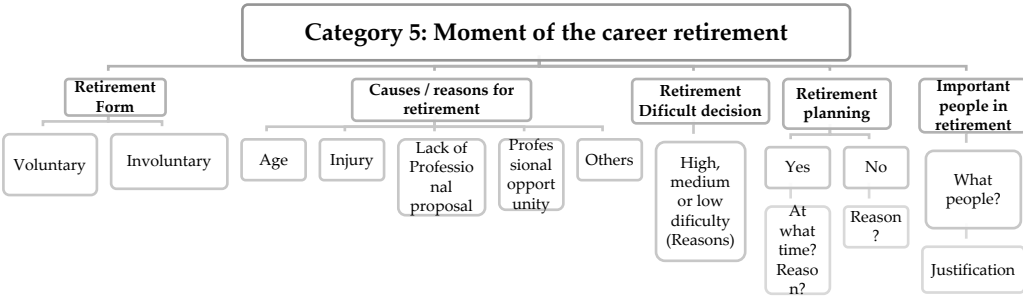


Figure 5. Matrix with response codes regarding the professional career retirement.

From the content analysis it is possible to identify the most significant positive and negative factors of transition quality and the resources available for the players which, by itself, helps in the implementation of specialized intervention models by levels (i.e., cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social) that have purpose of helping athletes who had negative transitions [45].

However, building upon the concept that career and sport transitions should be examined considering the athlete as a holistic entity within a specific context [1], categories 6 (see Figure 6) and 7 (see Figure 7) emphasize the quality factors and resources that are integral to the transition process, as well as they define the subsequent path of former football players post-career.

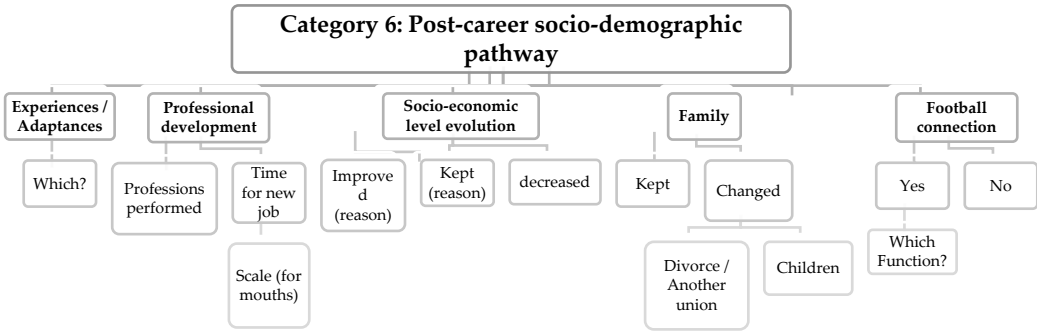


Figure 6. Matrix with response codes regarding post-career sociodemographic pathway.

For the characterization of socio-demographic variables, the answers showed descriptions related to the experiences and adaptations in post-career period, the professional path, the changes at socio-economic level, the dynamics and development of the family, and the continuity (or discontinuity) related to the connection that former players maintained with football, as described and proposed in other studies [21,22,32,55,66,67].

In the epidemiological characterization, the results allow us to recognize if there are (or have been) health problems, medical follow-up and medical-surgical interventions in the post-career period, aspects that are also highlighted in several scientific papers reviewed [14,15,35,51,55,64].

At the same time, by analyzing the criteria concerning perceptions of career impact, we gather the former players' overarching views regarding the positive and/or negative effects linked to their professional careers, encompassing physical, mental, and social dimensions.

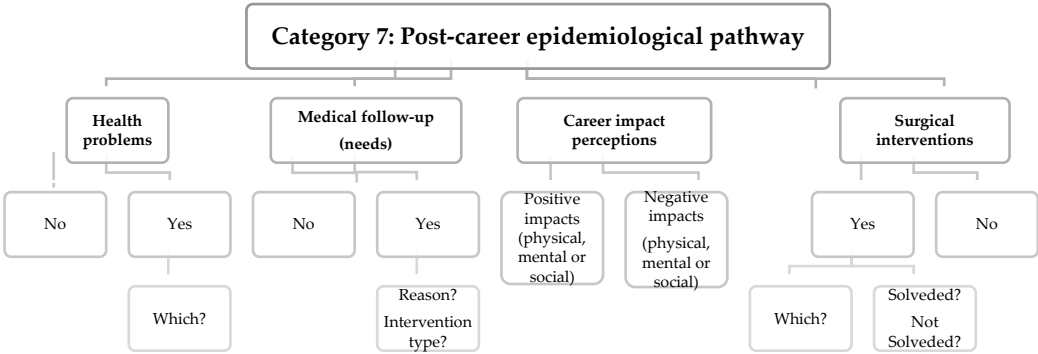


Figure 7. Matrix with response codes for the post-career epidemiological pathway.

In summary, it was possible to develop the matrices proposed in Figures 6 and 7, where the possible response codes are presented. Through content analysis, the type of answers given by the interviewees allow us to understand the health problems that occurred in post-career, whether former players needed support or medical follow-up, whether there were surgical interventions and, especially, in the case occurrence of health problems, their perception of whether this could be related to their professional career.

The last category of the interview guide aims to gather the former players opinions regarding the importance of post-career planning, the knowledge and importance of support programs, their suggestions on the topic and, also, from a retrospective, the identification of key moments and possible addictions or dependencies experienced during their life path [19,21,43,52,64,68].

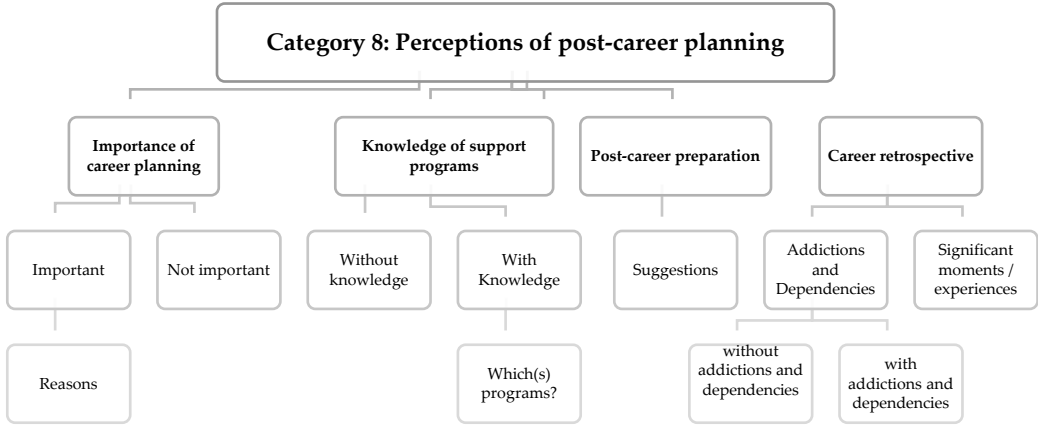


Figure 8. Matrix with response codes regarding former players perceptions of post-career planning.

From the content analysis of the research, it is possible to create codes from four sub-criteria. In this perspective, it seems relevant to assess the set of opinions and suggestions of former professional players that may contribute to the transfer of recommendations to support programs for career transition [69], in order to help players to get involved in life after sport, helping them to understand the skills they need to succeeded in other areas of activity.

4. Conclusions

The use of the investigative technique of interview survey is an important research instrument that allows achieving a deep knowledge of the object of study, to the extent that it allows, based on the information provided by the interviewees, to (re)construct meanings and senses [58].

Under this premise, the interview guide designed to investigate the impacts of a sports career on the quality of life of Portuguese former football players has proven effective in collecting both qualitative and quantitative data through content analysis. The instrument demonstrates efficiency as it delves deeply into the situational context of former players, facilitating a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of their experiences as conveyed by the diverse research participants. This is evident in the matrices developed for each of the guide's areas, categories, and subcategories. The instrument seems pertinent regarding data collection for the scope of research oriented towards the study of socio-demographic and epidemiological impacts arising from a professional football career, with transcultural characteristics, focused on individual and multidimensional perception in assessing quality of life and specific contexts.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at the website of this paper posted on Preprints.org.

Author Contributions: The drafting of the manuscript was primarily led by E.T. The conception of the idea can be attributed to E.T. The data acquisition involved contributions from E.T., C.S., and A.V. Additionally, E.T. played a key role in interpreting the data and crafting the introduction section. E.T., C.S. and A.V. participated in a comprehensive review and critical analysis of the scoping review manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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