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Organizational Stressors, Appraisals, Coping, and Performance in Field Hockey Players

Faye F. Didymus¹ and David Fletcher²

¹Carnegie School of Sport, Leeds Metropolitan University

²School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University

PURPOSE: Framed by transactional stress theory, this study aimed to explore the associations between significant components of the organizational stress process in sport performers. Specifically, this study explored the organizational stressors encountered, the situational properties of these stressors, the transactional alternatives experienced, the coping strategies used, athletes' short-term perceived coping effectiveness, and the subjective performance outcomes associated with the performers' stress experiences.

METHOD: Ten high level field hockey players were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. In order to establish a clear skill level for the participants, a high level athlete was defined as an individual currently competing in the English national field hockey league who had a minimum of five years competitive experience at this level. The interview guide was designed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted between 49 and 89 minutes ($M_{\text{length}} = 68$, $SD = 13$).

DATA ANALYSES: The data relating to organizational stressors and coping strategies were initially analysed using inductive content analysis to systematically understand the data collected from the participants. The data relating to stressors and coping strategies were then deductively analysed to confirm the appropriateness of the themes and general dimensions based on previous stress and coping research. The data referring to situational properties of stressors were deductively grouped as one of seven properties. Appraisals were deductively categorised as threat, challenge, harm/loss, irrelevant, or benign-positive and the performance outcome data were grouped as positive, negative, or neutral. Mean coping effectiveness scores were calculated for each coping strategy.

RESULTS: A variety of organizational stressors were reported by the players, which were underpinned by five of the seven situational properties. The appraisal experienced was linked to the situational property of the stressor encountered. Positive performance outcomes were most likely when the stressor was appraised as a challenge and, thus, the appraisal made appears to have a pivotal influence on performance outcomes. Problem solving was the most commonly reported family of coping. The coping strategies that were perceived to be highly effective were not necessarily associated with positive performance outcomes.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS: Practitioners should emphasise the link between challenge appraisals and positive performance outcomes and encourage athletes to make positive appraisals of the stressors encountered.

CONCLUSION: This study emphasises the complex and idiographic nature of organizational stress transactions and suggests that careful consideration should be given to the associations between different components of athletes' stressful experiences.

Keywords: cognition, transactional alternatives, interviews, coping effectiveness, sport

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