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Swimmers' Experiences of Organizational Stress:

Exploring the Roles of Cognitive Appraisal and Coping Behaviors

BACKGROUND: Cognitive appraisal and coping are central components of transactional stress theory. Sport psychology research to date has adopted a reductionist approach to the categorization of coping and appraisal-coping associations have yet to be explored in a sport organizational context.

AIMS/OBJECTIVES: The objectives of this study were to investigate sport performers' micro- and macro-level coping behaviors in response to organizational stressors, to examine the utility of Skinner, Edge, Altman, and Sherwood's (2003) categorization of coping within a sport context, to determine the short-term perceived effectiveness of the coping behaviors used, and to explore appraisal-coping associations.

METHODS: Thirteen national standard swimmers completed a qualitative diary every day for 28 days. Each diary entry consisted of an open-ended stressor section, an appraisal section, a coping response section, and a 5-point Likert-type measure of perceived coping effectiveness. Deductive content analysis was used to analyze the diary entries in addition to frequency data that were calculated for coping behaviors. Mean coping effectiveness scores were summated for each coping behavior that was used.

RESULTS: Seventy three micro-level coping behaviors were identified, which supported ten of Skinner et al.'s (2003) macro-level families of coping. A total of 22 different combinations of coping families were identified. The perceived most effective coping strategy used in isolation was "self-reliance" and in combination was "escape and negotiation." Primary appraisal mechanisms appear to be linked to the coping family employed.

CONCLUSION: The results highlight the complexity of coping and point to the importance of appraisal-coping associations when considering stress management interventions. It was concluded that Skinner et al.'s (2003) categorization of coping provides a promising

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conceptual framework for the development of coping research in sport.

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