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Woodhead, C and Didymus, F and Clarke, N (2022) Interpersonal stress in sport: Exploring coping in the coach-athlete-parent triad. In: Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 29 November 2022 - 30 November 2022, Swansea. (Unpublished)

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Interpersonal Stress in Sport: Exploring Coping in the Coach-Athlete-Parent Triad

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Purpose: To understand the shared stressors experienced by members of the coach-athlete-parent triad, how they cope with such stressors, and what factors facilitate coping among the triad.

Background: The interpersonal nature of stress (e.g., Bodenmann & colleagues, 1995; 1997; 2005a; 2005b) has been recognized in a nominal number of studies in sport. This work has, for example, investigated interpersonal coping in various sport relationships (e.g., coach-athlete; Staff et al., 2017a, 2017b, 2020). However, no research has investigated the three members (coach, athlete, parent) of what Smith et al. (1989) termed the athletic triangle.

Methods: Guided by our constructionist epistemological position and our relativist view of reality, we conducted four semi-structured interviews with individuals from one sport triad (i.e., one coach, one athlete, one parent). We analyzed the data using reflexive thematic analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Results: We constructed four themes: honest communication, closeness, empathy, and trust and respect. The findings uncover the importance of friendship in the triad and the presence of mutual understanding before coping initiation. Whilst the triad did experience interpersonal stress, few transactions occurred triadically and, instead, manifested among various dyadic relationships (e.g., coach-athlete, parent-athlete).

Conclusion: Members of coach-athlete-parent triads should communicate regularly; build and maintain closeness; and remain empathetic, trusting, and respecting of one another to facilitate coping. Although many stress transactions occur dyadically, some triadic

interactions assisted with the facilitation of coping which can be fostered via honest communication.

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