



## Literature review

# Sport psychology education for sport injury rehabilitation professionals: A systematic review



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## ABSTRACT

Sport psychology education has been shown to have a positive impact on the practice of sport injury rehabilitation professionals (SIRPs). The purpose of this paper is to review recommendations relating to such education. The paper presents a review of existing literature relating to the content and mode of delivery for a sport psychology education programme for SIRPs. The review seeks to address four questions: (1) What topic areas do researchers suggest should be integrated into the sport psychology education of SIRPs? (2) What topic areas are currently being recommended by professional bodies? (3) What are the findings of research examining the impact of sport psychology education on SIRPs? and (4) What do researchers recommend to be the most appropriate mode of delivery for sport psychology education for SIRPs? The findings of the review suggest that in order to maximise adherence amongst already qualified SIRPs sport psychology education should be delivered in a flexible short duration package. Additionally three broad areas that sport psychology education should cover emerged: (1) understanding of the psychological impact of injury, (2) interventions and psychological skills/techniques, and (3) referral and professional boundaries. This has important implications for the future training of SIRPs.

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## 1. Introduction

Sport psychology intervention has been shown to benefit sport injury rehabilitation (Armataş, Chondrou, Yiannakos, Galazoulas, & Velkopoulos, 2007; Levy, Polman, Clough, & McNaughton, 2006). As such previous research investigating the attitudes and behaviours of sport injury rehabilitation professionals (SIRPs) has indicated that sport psychology education is likely to have a positive impact on the sport psychology related behaviours of SIRPs (Arvinen-Barrow, Hemmings, Weigand, Becker, & Booth, 2007; Hamson-Utley, Martin, & Walters, 2008; Heaney, 2006a). However, the nature of such education is clearly important, as a poorly designed education programme with little relevance to its target audience will likely have much less impact than a well designed programme with highly relevant content. Previous researchers have discussed the appropriate content and mode of education on the psychological aspects of sport injury for SIRPs, but to date no research has reviewed the existing literature. This is necessary in order to help shape and standardise psychology education for SIRPs, which has

been found to be inconsistent (Heaney, Green, Rostron, & Walker, 2012). Therefore the purpose of this paper is to present a review of this work with the aim of identifying the most appropriate content and mode of delivery for a sport psychology education programme. The review will specifically seek to address the following research questions:

1. What topic areas do researchers suggest should be integrated into the sport psychology education of SIRPs?
2. What topic areas are currently being recommended by professional bodies?
3. What are the findings of research examining the impact of sport psychology education on SIRPs?
4. What do researchers recommend to be the most appropriate mode of delivery for sport psychology education for SIRPs?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Sources

The strategy used to identify published materials relating to the education and training of SIRPs involved: (1) electronic searches of online databases including SPORTDiscus, PubMed, Academic

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Search Complete, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, MEDLINE, CINAHL, and Google Scholar, (2) checking citations within publications identified through electronic searches, (3) manual searches of key journal titles including Journal of Sport Rehabilitation, The Sport Psychologist, Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, Psychology of Sport & Exercise, Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, Journal of Athletic Training, Physical Therapy in Sport, Journal of Medicine & Science in Sport, British Journal of Sports Medicine, and (4) searching the websites of key professional bodies including the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Sports Medicine, National Athletic Training Association, Sports Therapy Council and Society of Sports Therapists. Combinations of the following search terms were used when conducting online searches: sport(s) psychology, sport(s) injury, rehabilitation, education, training, physiotherapist, athletic trainer, sport(s) therapist, physical therapist, and sports medicine. The inclusion criteria for publications were that they must include content relating to the education and training of SIRPs relative to one of the four research questions, be in English language and peer reviewed (with the exception of those relating to professional bodies). Since this is a relatively novel area of research, no restrictions were placed on the age of publication.

## 2.2. Procedure

Copies of the publications identified were obtained and assessed for relevance in accordance with the inclusion criteria. Those deemed relevant were then grouped into four key areas relating to the research questions: (1) content recommendations from scientific studies, (2) content recommendations from professional bodies, (3) research which measures the effectiveness of sport psychology education, and (4) research examining the most appropriate mode of sport psychology education. Quality assessment checks were undertaken using a quality assessment checklist to ensure that the selected papers (with the exclusion of those related to professional bodies) had an appropriate and rigorous methodology (Smith, 2010). The relevant data from these publications were then extracted, synthesised and content analysis undertaken. The extraction strategy included the use of data extraction forms relating to each research question as suggested by Smith (2010).

## 3. Results and discussion

In total 34 publications were identified that satisfied the inclusion criteria. Of these, 26 related to content recommendations from scientific studies, 3 to content recommendations from professional bodies, 4 to research which provided and measured the effectiveness of sport psychology education, and 2 to research examining the most appropriate mode of sport psychology education (one paper was used in two research question areas, thus the total number of papers is 34 not 35). These are discussed in the following sections addressing each of the four research questions identified in the introduction.

### 3.1. Question 1: What topic areas do researchers suggest should be integrated into the sport psychology education of SIRPs?

Various studies investigating SIRPs' attitudes and behaviours in relation to the role of sport psychology in sport injury rehabilitation have called for enhanced sport psychology education for these professionals (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2007; Hamson-Utley et al., 2008; Heaney, 2006a; Tracey, 2008). Often these studies have highlighted particular areas that such education should address.

Twenty-six such studies were identified as part of this review and the topics recommended by these are summarised in Table 1.

The table shows a reasonably high degree of consistency in perceptions of what should be covered, with 17 of the 21 topic areas being suggested by 5 or more studies. Interpersonal communication was the most commonly cited topic area that SIRPs are believed to need training in (18 studies). The psychological techniques of positive self-talk (15 studies) imagery (14 studies), goal setting (13 studies) and relaxation (12 studies) were also recommended by a large proportion of the studies, as was athlete referral (12 studies). It is interesting to note that these topic areas with the highest levels of consistency all relate to practical skills rather than theoretical knowledge. This could be indicative of a perception that practical skills are more important than theoretical knowledge for SIRPs, or it could instead reflect a perception that these practical skills must inherently be supported by theoretical knowledge. Since many of the studies involved were focused on wider issues, they often stated topics they thought were important, without any deeper discussion regarding their specific nature and teaching. However, there does appear to be a strong consensus in the literature that any education intervention for SIRPs should be applied or practical in nature (Clement & Shannon, 2009; Hamson-Utley et al., 2008; Heaney, 2006a), using teaching methods such as case studies, role play and reflective practice in order to promote implementation of sport psychology strategies in clinical practice (Clement & Shannon, 2009; Stiller-Ostrowski & Hamson-Utley, 2009).

**Table 1**

Topic areas suggested to be important in the education and training of sport injury rehabilitation professionals (SIRPs).

| Topic  | Number of studies recommended |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Interpersonal communication  | 18                            |
| Positive self-talk/cognitive restructuring                         | 15                            |
| Imagery  | 14                            |
| Goal setting   | 13                            |
| Listening skills/counselling skills                                | 13                            |
| Relaxation techniques  | 12                            |
| Athlete referral to a sport psychologist or other practitioner     | 12                            |
| Providing/improving social support                                 | 11                            |
| Stress/anxiety/arousal   | 10                            |
| Motivation and adherence   | 10                            |
| Athlete self confidence  | 9                             |
| Concentration/attention  | 9                             |
| Depression   | 7                             |
| Recognising and evaluating psychological reactions to sport injury | 7                             |
| Emotional control strategies                                       | 6                             |
| Professional boundaries  | 6                             |
| Creating variety in rehabilitation exercises                       | 5                             |
| Emotional control strategies                                       | 6                             |
| Professional boundaries  | 6                             |
| Behaviour modification   | 2                             |
| Coping behaviours  | 1                             |
| Malingering  | 1                             |
| Pain management strategies   | 1                             |

Studies used: Arvinen-Barrow et al. (2007), Arvinen-Barrow, Penny, Hemmings, and Corr (2010), Barefield and McCallister (1997), Bone and Fry (2006), Clement and Shannon (2009), Cramer Roh and Perna (2000) Ford and Gordon (1993, 1997, 1998), Francis, Andersen, and Maley (2000), Gordon, Milios, and Grove (1991), 1998), Hamson-Utley et al. (2008), Harris et al. (2005), Heaney (2006a, 2006b), Hemmings and Povey (2002), Lafferty, Kenyon, and Wright (2008), Larson, Starkey, and Zaichkowsky (1996), Moulton, Molstad, and Turner (1997), Ninedek and Kolt (2000), Stiller-Ostrowski and Ostrowski (2009), Tracey (2008), Washington-Lofgren et al. (2004), Wiese and Weiss (1987), Wiese, Weiss, and Yukelson (1991). For studies which used a question asking participants to rate on a Likert scale which skills/techniques, from a given list, it is important for SIRPs to learn, only skills/techniques achieving a mean score of 3 (5-point Likert scale) or 5 (7-point Likert scale) and above are included in the table.

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