



## The TASS-Q: The Team-referent Availability of Social Support Questionnaire



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### ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** To provide initial evidence for the construct validity of the Team-referent Availability of Social Support Questionnaire (the TASS-Q).

**Design:** Cross-sectional in Study 1, and two time points in Study 2.

**Method:** The preliminary study required participants ( $N = 47$ ) to assess the content validity—dimensional belonging, understanding, and relevance—of the TASS-Q items. In Study 1, participants ( $n = 336$ ) completed the TASS-Q and measures of social desirability and negative affectivity. In Study 2, approximately one week before a competition (Day 1, Time 1) participants ( $n = 413$ ) completed the TASS-Q; approximately 1 h before the same competition (Day 7–9, Time 2) participants completed measures of collective efficacy in relation to the impending competition and team cohesion.

**Results:** Following evidence for the scale content validity of the TASS-Q in the preliminary study, Study 1 provided support for the factor structure of the TASS-Q comprising emotional, esteem, informational, and tangible dimensions. Study 2 provided partial evidence for the factor structure of the TASS-Q and evidence of the criterion-related validity of the measure, demonstrating that (a) team-referent esteem support was a positive predictor of collective efficacy, (b) support dimensions, collectively, explained significant variance in task cohesion dimensions, and (c) emotional support was a positive predictor of social cohesion (group integration—social).

**Conclusions:** The article provides initial evidence for the construct validity of the TASS-Q and demonstrates, for team-referent social support, the theoretical advantages of examining a multidimensional conceptualisation of perceived availability of social support.

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Research examining the impact of self-referent social support has provided extensive evidence that perceptions of social support are an important resource for athletes and linked to enhanced self-determined motivation (DeFreese & Smith, 2013), self-confidence (Freeman & Rees, 2010), and performance (Freeman & Rees, 2009). Evidence for the importance of social support at the team-referent level, however, is sparse. This is surprising because (a) researchers have argued that teams should employ strategies to enhance their social support (e.g., Rosenfeld & Richman, 1997), and (b) there is a growing distinction in the literature that recognises the roles of self- and team-referent orientations (e.g., self- and

collective-efficacy, see Bandura, 1997; Chase, Feltz, & Lirgg, 2003). Team-referent social support refers to team members' individual perceptions of the supportive resources available to or actually received by their team. The current article presents initial evidence for the construct validity of a four-factor measure of team-referent perceived availability of social support in sport.

Social support is a multi-faceted construct, including structural and functional components (Cohen, Gottlieb, & Underwood, 2000; Vangelisti, 2009). Structural components describe the type and number of relationships one has with other individuals and social groups. Functional components describe the supportive purposes served by other individuals and groups, and are often categorised within dimensions including emotional, esteem, informational, and tangible support (Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Freeman, Coffee, & Rees, 2011; Rees & Hardy, 2000). Emotional support comprises comfort, security, and a sense of being loved and cared for. Esteem support

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comprises the bolstering of esteem and sense of competence. Informational support comprises advice and guidance. Tangible support comprises practical and instrumental assistance. Importantly, researchers (e.g., Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010; Vangelisti, 2009) have further conceptualised functional support in terms of the belief that support is available if needed (*perceived* support) and the frequency with which supportive resources have been received during a specific time frame (*received* support). Perceived and received support are only moderately correlated (Haber, Cohen, Lucas, & Baltes, 2007) and they have different relationships with outcomes. Across literature, while effects for received support are variable (e.g., see Uchino, 2004, 2009), perceived support has been consistently associated with favourable outcomes including higher self-confidence (Rees & Freeman, 2007), psychological resilience (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014), and performance (Boat & Taylor, 2015; Freeman & Rees, 2009), and lower burnout (DeFreese & Smith, 2013).

In a response to recommendations to develop theoretically based measures of support specific to sport (Bianco & Eklund, 2001; Holt & Hoar, 2006; Rees, 2007), Freeman et al. (2011) developed a self-referent measure of perceived support: the Perceived Available Support in Sport Questionnaire (PASS-Q). The measure was developed from statements provided by high-level athletes about their social support experiences. The PASS-Q demonstrated good model fit for a four-dimension factor structure across two independent samples, together with coefficient alpha reliabilities of 0.68–0.89 and test-retest reliabilities of 0.73–0.84. The PASS-Q has enriched understanding of the importance of support for individual athletes, correlating with factors such as burnout, self-confidence, organisational stressors, and self-referenced performance (Arnold, Fletcher, & Daniels, 2013; Boat & Taylor, 2015; Freeman et al., 2011).

The PASS-Q has been used in team settings to assess team members' perceptions of perceived support (e.g., Freeman et al., 2011). However, group members are providing their perceptions of support available to them as individuals and this might not reflect their perceptions of available support to their team as a collective. Group dynamics researchers often use the term "team-referent" when referring to individual perceptions or beliefs about group processes (Gill, Ruder, & Gross, 1982; Greenlees, Lane, Thelwell, Holder, & Hobson, 2005). This is because the construct of interest is at the group level but can only be measured through the assessment of individuals that will often differ (at least to some degree) in their perception or belief about the group. The distinction between self-referent and team-referent approaches has been explored in other literature with differential effects observed on outcomes. For example, in the efficacy literature, research has demonstrated that aggregated collective efficacy is a better predictor of team sport performance than aggregated self-efficacy (Myers, Feltz, & Short, 2004). Further, although in sport there is limited understanding of team-referent perceived availability of social support, in organisational research team-referent support has been associated with individual and team outcomes including altruism, teamwork, and team mindedness (Pearce & Herbik, 2004). As such, developing a team-referent measure of social support in sport will permit exploration of, and advance knowledge about, the differential effects of self- and team-referent operationalisations of social support.

An advantage of adopting a team-referent approach to examining social support is that it allows examination of variables related to the team environment, such as effects of team-referent social support on collective efficacy. Indeed, social support (in the form of verbal persuasion) is predicted to affect the development of collective efficacy in groups (Bandura, 1997) and research at the individual level has demonstrated that self-efficacy is higher among individuals who perceive a greater amount of personal

support (Rees & Freeman, 2009). Leadership factors (including social support) are also highlighted in conceptual models of team cohesion as both contributing to and emerging from cohesive teams (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1998), and social support has been identified as an important correlate of cohesion in exercise groups (Christensen, Schmidt, Budtz-Jørgensen, & Avlund, 2006; Fraser & Spink, 2002). Drawing from these observations, it appears appropriate to explore the effects of team-referent social support upon collective efficacy and team cohesion.

Two important considerations in the development of a new measure of social support are (1) whether it should measure overall perceptions of available support or include assessments for separate providers of support, and (2) whether social support should be assessed as a unidimensional or multidimensional construct. Although Bianco (2001) highlighted that it may be important to understand the effects of support from specific providers, Wills and Shinar (2000) noted that measures which assess overall support from a range of providers (e.g., Interpersonal Support Evaluation List, Social Provisions Scale) have successfully predicted important outcomes in general populations and specific samples. In regards to the second consideration, a key advantage of a multidimensional measure of social support is that it allows the differential impact of specific supportive functions to be explored. Indeed, researchers have found that specific support dimensions are more important when matched to contextual factors including specific stressors and the domain of functioning (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Frese, 1999). For example, esteem support is considered to be the most important dimension in achievement contexts (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Consistent with this notion, esteem support has been identified as the most important component of perceived support for self-confidence (Freeman et al., 2011) and performance (Freeman & Rees, 2009). Moreover, the relative importance of social support dimensions depends on the outcome variable, such that emotional support would be most beneficial to alleviate emotional exhaustion (de Jonge & Dormann, 2006). Based on this principle, esteem support might be most important for collective efficacy, instrumental forms of support (informational and tangible) most important for task cohesion, and affective forms of support (emotional and esteem) most important for social cohesion.

The purpose of the current article was to provide initial evidence for the construct validity of a four-factor (emotional, esteem, informational, and tangible) measure of team-referent perceived availability of social support in sport: the Team-referent Availability of Social Support Questionnaire (TASS-Q). Specifically, we examined the content validity, factor structure, and criterion-related validity of the TASS-Q. The examination of content validity focused on the dimensional belonging of items, and the understanding and relevance of items to team sport; the factor structure was tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to determine whether the TASS-Q is statistically consistent with the underpinning theoretical model; and, criterion-related (predictive) validity was explored to examine if subscales of the TASS-Q were statistically associated with *a priori* theorised variables. The TASS-Q assesses *team members' individual perceptions of available support for their team*. In the preliminary study, we examined the content validity of the TASS-Q items. In Study 1, we tested the factor structure of the TASS-Q through CFA, controlling for the nested nature of the data and confirming a uniform factor structure of the TASS-Q across teams. In Study 2, we again tested the factor structure of the TASS-Q through CFA and explored the criterion-related validity of the measure through examining relationships between TASS-Q dimensions and two outcome variables associated with high performance in teams: collective efficacy and team cohesion. Specifically, we first examined bivariate correlations and then

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