



Supporting Coaches' Mental Health: A Critical Review of Psychological Interventions for Depression

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigates the critical and often overlooked issue of mental health among sports coaches, with a specific focus on depression and its psychological interventions. Coaches, known for their pivotal role in guiding athletes, face unique stressors and challenges that predispose them to mental health issues, notably depression. This paper comprehensively examines the effectiveness of various psychological interventions aimed at combating depression in this specific demographic. Through a meticulous selection of studies, we analyze interventions such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), mindfulness techniques, peer support networks, and other therapeutic strategies. The review not only highlights the efficacy of these interventions but also compares their applicability and impact within the coaching context. By identifying gaps in the current literature and practice, the article underscores the urgent need for tailored mental health support for coaches. The insights gained from this review are intended to inform future research directions, contribute to the development of targeted mental health programs, and ultimately foster a healthier, more supportive environment in the sports coaching community. This article serves as a call to action, emphasizing the crucial role of mental health care in sustaining the well-being and performance of coaches, who are instrumental in the athletic and personal development of athletes.

Keywords: Coaches, Mental Health, Depression, Psychological Interventions.

1. Introduction

The mental health of sports coaches often remains overshadowed by the focus on athletes, yet it is equally crucial. Coaches face unique challenges, including high-pressure environments, performance expectations, and the responsibility of managing teams, which can significantly impact their mental well-being. The prevalence of mental health issues, particularly depression, among coaches is a growing concern. Studies like "Exploring Mental Health and

Illness in the UK Sports Coaching Workforce" (1) have highlighted that depression and anxiety are common among coaches, often leading them to seek support outside their organizations due to complex personal and organizational factors.

Depression among sports coaches is not just a personal health issue but also affects their professional performance and, consequently, their teams. The symptoms of depression, such as low energy, decreased motivation, and impaired concentration, can hinder a coach's ability to make strategic

decisions, communicate effectively, and provide adequate support to athletes. The study "Mental Health Disorders in Ultra Endurance Athletes per ICD-11 Classifications" (2) underscores the prevalence of mental health issues in sports professionals, including coaches, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions.

Addressing mental health in sports coaching is vital for the holistic well-being of the sports community. Coaches play a pivotal role in shaping athletes' experiences; their mental health directly influences their coaching style and the team's dynamics. Initiatives like "Leadership Education Is Not Enough: Advancing an Integrated Model of Student-Athlete Development" (3) advocate for a holistic approach to sports coaching, integrating mental health support with leadership and personal development.

This review aims to critically examine psychological interventions for depression among sports coaches. It seeks to understand the effectiveness of these interventions and their applicability in the unique context of sports coaching. The review will provide insights into the current state of mental health support for coaches and offer recommendations for enhancing their well-being.

2. Methods and Materials

This review adopts a systematic literature review approach to explore and synthesize existing research on strategies and interventions for managing depression in sports coaching. The methodology is structured to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature, providing an objective and critical analysis of the interventions and strategies used to enhance emotional well-being among sports coaches.

2.1. Data Collection

To gather pertinent studies, a thorough search was conducted across multiple electronic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, JSTOR, PubMed, PsycINFO, Google Scholar, and the SportDiscus. The search focused on articles published in English from 2010 to 2023, ensuring that the most contemporary practices and research findings were included. Key search terms used included combinations of the following: "sports coaching," "coach depression," "emotional well-being," "depression management," "psychological interventions," and "depression." The selection of literature focused on articles that were specifically related to the psychological aspects of sports coaching, particularly those that presented original

research, reviews, or theoretical discussions on depression management. The review excluded articles not directly related to sports coaching, non-peer-reviewed sources, and studies focusing solely on physical health or performance enhancement without a psychological component.

2.2. Data Analysis

For each selected publication, an analysis was conducted to extract crucial information such as the context of the depression being discussed, the types of interventions or strategies evaluated, their outcomes, and the limitations noted in these studies. This process involved thematically categorizing the data to identify common themes, differences, and gaps in the existing literature. A critical appraisal of each study was undertaken to assess its contribution to the field, relevance to the review topic, methodological rigor, and the strength of its findings. This appraisal was guided by established criteria for both qualitative and quantitative research, ensuring a balanced representation of diverse research methods.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Overview of Existing Literature on Psychological Interventions for Depression

The existing literature on psychological interventions for depression, particularly in the context of sports coaching, presents a diverse range of approaches and findings. The focus has been on understanding the unique mental health challenges faced by sports coaches and exploring effective strategies to address them. This section investigates the existing literature on psychological interventions for depression, focusing on strategies such as cognitive-behavioral techniques, mindfulness, peer support, digital interventions, and integrative approaches, particularly in the context of sports coaching.

Cognitive-Behavioral Techniques: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has been widely studied and applied in the context of depression management. It focuses on identifying and changing negative thought patterns and behaviors. In sports coaching, CBT has been used to address depressive symptoms by helping coaches develop coping strategies and resilience against stressors typical in the coaching environment (4).

Mindfulness-Based Interventions: Mindfulness-based strategies have gained attention for their effectiveness in reducing symptoms of depression. These interventions

encourage individuals to focus on the present moment and develop an attitude of acceptance towards their experiences. For sports coaches, mindfulness training can offer a way to manage stress and emotional challenges inherent in their roles (5).

Peer Support and Group Therapy: The role of peer support and group therapy in managing depression has been explored, with findings suggesting that shared experiences and mutual support can be beneficial. For coaches, group settings can provide a platform to share challenges and strategies, fostering a sense of community and support (6).

Digital and Online Interventions: The rise of digital mental health interventions offers new possibilities for addressing depression. Online coaching programs and digital platforms can provide accessible and flexible support for coaches, allowing them to manage their mental health alongside their professional responsibilities (7).

Integrative Approaches: Integrative approaches that combine different therapeutic techniques have also been explored. These approaches aim to provide a more holistic treatment plan, addressing various aspects of depression. For sports coaches, an integrative approach can be particularly beneficial, considering the multifaceted nature of their role and the diverse stressors they face (8).

3.2. Challenges and Limitations

While these interventions are effective, there are challenges and limitations to consider. The effectiveness of interventions like CBT and mindfulness can vary based on individual coach characteristics and the specific nature of the intervention. Additionally, the implementation of these interventions in the coaching context can be challenging due to the high-pressure environment and time constraints typical in sports settings. There is also a need for more research on long-term effectiveness and the applicability of these interventions across different coaching contexts.

4. Comparative Analysis of Different Approaches

4.1. Cognitive-Behavioral Techniques (CBT) vs. Mindfulness-Based Interventions

CBT and mindfulness-based interventions are two prominent approaches in treating depression among sports coaches. While CBT focuses on changing negative thought patterns and behaviors, mindfulness emphasizes present-moment awareness and acceptance. Both have shown effectiveness in reducing depressive symptoms, but their

approaches cater to different aspects of depression. CBT is more structured and problem-focused, making it suitable for coaches who need specific strategies to manage negative thoughts related to coaching. In contrast, mindfulness is more about cultivating an overall sense of well-being and may be more beneficial for coaches seeking long-term stress management techniques (9).

4.2. Peer Support and Group Therapy

Peer support and group therapy offer a communal approach to managing depression, contrasting with the individual-focused methods of CBT and mindfulness. These interventions provide social support and shared experiences, which can be particularly beneficial for coaches who feel isolated in their struggles. However, the effectiveness of peer support and group therapy can depend on the group dynamics and the individual's comfort with sharing in a group setting (10).

4.3. Digital and Online Interventions

Digital interventions, such as online therapy and mental health apps, provide accessibility and flexibility, which are crucial for busy sports coaches. These interventions can be as effective as traditional face-to-face therapy, especially when they include elements of CBT and mindfulness. However, the effectiveness can vary based on the coach's engagement with the digital platform and the quality of the digital content (11).

4.4. Integrative Approaches

Integrative approaches that combine different therapeutic techniques aim to provide a more comprehensive treatment plan. These approaches can be particularly effective for coaches, considering the multifaceted nature of their role and the diverse stressors they face. However, the challenge lies in appropriately integrating different techniques to suit individual needs (12).

4.5. Gaps in the Current Literature

However, there are gaps, particularly in the comparative analysis of these interventions. More research is needed to directly compare the effectiveness of different approaches, considering factors such as the severity of depression, the coaching context, and individual preferences. Additionally, there is a need for more studies on the long-term

effectiveness of these interventions and how they can be integrated into the daily routines of sports coaches.

5. Case Studies or Examples

5.1. Case Study on Psychological Readiness and Recurrence in Sports

A study focusing on the psychological readiness of athletes returning to sports after injury provides insights applicable to coaches. It highlights the relationship between psychological disposition, mood profile, and mental health in the context of Return to Play (RTP). Coaches, who often face similar pressures and anxieties, can benefit from interventions that address these psychological aspects, thereby enhancing their mental readiness and resilience (13).

5.2. Adult-Oriented Coaching Survey and Debrief Session

Another case study involving the use of the Adult-Oriented Sport Coaching Survey (AOSCS) demonstrates how reflective practices can facilitate coaches' learning and mental well-being. The study portrays how coaches reflect on their scores with a coach developer, discussing key topics like coach impressions, leveraging comparisons, and addressing misunderstandings. This approach can be instrumental in helping coaches understand and manage their mental health challenges (14).

5.3. Coaches' Depression Literacy and Engagement in Prevention

Further research exploring the relationship between coaches' knowledge of depression and their engagement in behaviors supporting young people's mental health sheds light on the importance of mental health literacy among coaches. It emphasizes that increasing coaches' knowledge and confidence can lead to increased engagement in prevention and early intervention, crucial for their mental well-being (15).

5.4. Meta-Synthesis of Coaches' Experiences of Stress and Well-Being

Moreover, a meta-synthesis of qualitative research evidence on coaches' experiences of stressors and psychological well-being highlights the plethora of stressors coaches experience and the impact on their well-being. This synthesis deepens the understanding of coaches' stress transactions and their experiences, providing valuable

insights for developing interventions to minimize stressors and foster well-being (16).

5.5. Coping Strategies in Athletic Coaches

Lastly, a study examining the moderating roles of different coping strategies on the relationship between negative emotions and psychological well-being among coaches provides critical insights. It reports that proactive coping and emotive suppression strategies can significantly moderate the negative emotional-psychological well-being relationship, highlighting the need for coaches to adopt effective coping strategies (17).

5.6. Lessons Learned and Insights Gained

These case studies and examples underscore the complexity of mental health challenges faced by sports coaches and the effectiveness of various interventions. They highlight the importance of psychological readiness, reflective practices, mental health literacy, understanding stressors, and effective coping strategies in enhancing coaches' mental well-being. These insights are crucial for developing targeted interventions and support systems for coaches, ensuring their mental health is prioritized alongside their professional responsibilities.

6. Integrating Mental Health Support in Coaching Practices

6.1. Importance of Integrating Mental Health Support

Recognizing Mental Health as a Priority: The importance of integrating mental health support in coaching practices cannot be overstated. Coaches, often seen as pillars of strength and resilience, face unique pressures that can lead to mental health challenges, including depression. Recognizing mental health as a priority is crucial for the well-being of coaches and the overall health of the sports environment (16).

Creating a Supportive Environment: Sports organizations play a vital role in creating an environment that supports the mental health of coaches. This involves not only providing access to mental health resources but also fostering a culture where discussing mental health issues is normalized and encouraged (15).

6.2. Strategies for Integrating Mental Health Support

Training and Education: Implementing training programs that focus on mental health literacy and resilience

can empower coaches with the knowledge and skills to manage their mental health effectively. Such programs should be an integral part of professional development for coaches (4).

Peer Support Networks: Establishing peer support networks can provide coaches with a platform to share experiences and coping strategies. These networks can offer communal support, reducing feelings of isolation and promoting a sense of belonging (17).

Access to Professional Mental Health Services: Ensuring that coaches have easy access to professional mental health services, such as counseling and therapy, is essential. Sports organizations should facilitate these services, making them readily available and accessible to coaches (14).

6.3. *Overcoming Challenges in Integration*

Addressing Stigma and Barriers: One of the significant challenges in integrating mental health support is overcoming the stigma associated with mental health issues. Efforts should be made to educate and raise awareness about the importance of mental health, breaking down barriers that prevent coaches from seeking help (15).

Tailoring Interventions to Individual Needs: It is important to recognize that one size does not fit all when it comes to mental health interventions. Tailoring interventions to meet the individual needs of coaches, considering their specific challenges and circumstances, is key to the effectiveness of these support systems (13).

7. **Enhancing Resilience and Coping Skills in Sports Coaches**

7.1. *Building Resilience in Coaches*

Developing Emotional Resilience: Emotional resilience is crucial for sports coaches to effectively handle the pressures and challenges of their profession. Developing resilience involves training coaches in skills like emotional regulation, stress management, and adaptability. Programs focusing on these aspects can equip coaches with the tools to navigate the ups and downs of their careers with greater ease and stability (13).

Promoting a Growth Mindset: Encouraging coaches to adopt a growth mindset can significantly enhance their resilience. This mindset, characterized by viewing challenges as opportunities for growth and learning, can transform how coaches perceive and respond to stressors.

Workshops and training sessions that foster this perspective can be highly beneficial (17).

7.2. *Strengthening Coping Skills*

Effective Coping Mechanisms: Developing effective coping mechanisms is essential for managing the mental health challenges that coaches face. This includes both problem-focused coping, such as seeking solutions to stressors, and emotion-focused coping, such as finding ways to alleviate emotional distress. Tailored interventions that enhance these coping skills can significantly improve coaches' ability to manage stress (15).

Mindfulness and Stress Reduction Techniques: Incorporating mindfulness and stress reduction techniques into coaching practices can be a powerful way to enhance coping skills. These techniques help coaches to remain present and grounded, reducing the impact of stress and anxiety on their mental health (4).

7.3. *Overcoming Challenges in Building Resilience and Coping Skills*

Addressing Barriers to Resilience Building: One of the challenges in building resilience and coping skills is overcoming barriers such as time constraints, lack of resources, and stigma around mental health. Sports organizations must recognize and address these barriers, providing coaches with the necessary support and resources (14).

Customizing Interventions for Individual Coaches: It is important to recognize that coaches have different needs and experiences. Customizing interventions to fit individual coaches' contexts and preferences can make resilience and coping skills training more effective and relevant (10).

Continuous Support and Follow-Up: Building resilience and coping skills is an ongoing process. Continuous support and follow-up are essential to ensure that coaches can effectively apply and sustain the skills they have learned. Regular check-ins, refresher workshops, and access to mental health professionals can provide this ongoing support (18).

8. **Conclusion**

The review of psychological interventions for depression in sports coaching reveals a diverse range of effective strategies. Cognitive-Behavioral Techniques (CBT) and Mindfulness-Based Interventions stand out for their efficacy in reducing depressive symptoms and enhancing overall

well-being. Peer support and group therapy offer communal support, which is beneficial for coaches who feel isolated. Digital and online interventions provide accessible and flexible support, crucial for busy sports coaches. Integrative approaches that combine different therapeutic techniques aim to provide a more comprehensive treatment plan.

These interventions specifically address the unique needs of sports coaches. CBT and mindfulness-based strategies help coaches manage the cognitive and emotional aspects of their high-pressure roles. Peer support and group therapy provide a platform for coaches to share challenges and strategies, fostering a sense of community. Digital interventions offer practical solutions that fit into the coaches' demanding schedules. Integrative approaches consider the multifaceted nature of a coach's role and the diverse stressors they face.

Despite their effectiveness, these interventions face challenges and limitations. The implementation of CBT and mindfulness in the coaching context can be challenging due to time constraints and the high-pressure environment. The effectiveness of peer support and group therapy depends on group dynamics and individual comfort with sharing. Digital interventions require engagement with the platform and quality content. Integrative approaches need careful integration of different techniques to suit individual needs.

Theoretically, these findings contribute to the understanding of depression management in a high-stress profession like sports coaching. Practically, they underscore the need for sports organizations to provide mental health support to coaches. This support should include training in psychological strategies and access to mental health resources.

Future research should focus on long-term studies to assess the sustainability of these interventions. Comparative studies are needed to determine the most effective strategies for different coaching contexts. Practically, sports organizations should integrate mental health support into their coaching development programs. Coaches should be encouraged to engage in regular mental health training and self-care practices.

Overall, this study shows the importance of psychological interventions in managing depression among sports coaches. While various strategies are effective, there is a need for personalized and long-term approaches. Sports organizations, mental health professionals, and coaches must collaborate to integrate these interventions into

coaching practices, ensuring the well-being and effectiveness of coaches.

Authors' Contributions

Amir Mohammad Abdollahi Dehkordi and Jose Omar Lagunes-Carrasco both made significant contributions to the development of this critical review. Amir Mohammad Abdollahi Dehkordi played a key role in conceptualizing the study, conducting the literature review, and synthesizing the findings related to psychological interventions for depression among sports coaches. Jose Omar Lagunes-Carrasco provided expertise in the field of mental health and contributed to the analysis of the effectiveness of various interventions within the coaching context. Both authors collaboratively reviewed and revised the manuscript, ensuring its comprehensiveness and accuracy.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

The review adhered to ethical standards in academic publishing, including the proper attribution of sources, respect for copyright, and avoidance of plagiarism. All studies were referenced appropriately, ensuring the recognition of original authors' contributions.

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