The impact of sport psychology education on the practice of physiotherapists

Conference or Workshop Item

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Introduction

The occurrence of a sports injury can lead to several negative psychological reactions such as frustration, anger, anxiety and depression (e.g. Carson & Polman, 2008; Tracey, 2003). Sport psychology intervention has been shown to benefit sports injury rehabilitation (Armatas et al., 2007; Levy et al., 2006), however, it would appear that deficiencies in the training of sports physiotherapists in this area may be acting as a barrier to injured athletes receiving sport psychology support during rehabilitation. Generally research has shown that physiotherapists recognise the importance of psychological factors, but lack the training to utilise sport psychology (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2007). Within the research in this field there is almost universal agreement that the training of sports injury rehabilitation professionals (SIRPs), including physiotherapists, in sport psychology is inadequate (e.g. Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2010; Heaney, 2006), and SIRPs consistently express a desire to develop their knowledge of sport psychology theory and practice (e.g. Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2007; Heaney, 2006).

In light of these findings it has been suggested that sport psychology education is likely to have a positive impact on the sport psychology related behaviours of SIRPs (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2007; Hamson-Utley et al., 2008; Heaney, 2006). However, to date, only a limited number of studies (Harris et al., 2005; Clement & Shannon, 2009; Stiller-Ostrowski et al., 2008; Pros & Sachs, 1997) have delivered a sport psychology education package and measured its impact and all have examined US athletic trainer populations, with the majority of these being student populations. This would suggest that further research is needed examining a broader range of SIRPs, including those who are already qualified, since it has been suggested that those already qualified are also in need of sport psychology training (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2007; Hamson-Utley et al., 2008; Heaney, 2006).

Objective: The purpose of this investigation was to examine the impact of a sport psychology education package on qualified UK physiotherapists working in sport.

Method

Participants

The participants were 135 physiotherapists who responded to an invitation to participate in the study. Sixty-seven were randomly assigned to the intervention (sport psychology) group and 68 participants were randomly assigned to the control group. Of these 135 physiotherapists, 95 completed all stages of post-module follow-up (44 intervention group and 51 control group) and only data from these participants are analysed in the study. The intervention group (n=44) comprised 23 males and 21 females and had a mean age of 33.70 years (SD = 8.18). The control group (n=51) comprised 26 males and 25 females and had a mean age of 36.11 years (SD = 8.78).

Measures

Data was collected through a series of online questionnaires completed on four occasions over a six month period (1 pre-module questionnaire and 3 post-module questionnaires). The questionnaires were split into three main sections:

(i) The Attitudes About Imagery Survey (AAIS) (Hamson-Utley et al., 2008), which measured participants’ attitudes regarding the effectiveness of mental skills during sports injury rehabilitation

(ii) Psychology of Injury Usage Survey (PIUS) (Stiller-Ostrowski et al., 2009), which measured participants’ use of sport psychology skills and techniques

(iii) Supplementary information - The content of this section varied from year to year.

Procedure

After completing an informed consent form participants were randomly assigned to either the intervention group or the control group and asked to complete the pre-module version of the questionnaire. Upon completing this questionnaire participants were given the web address for their specific module and asked to commence the study. The participants were given a specific date by which they should complete the module, which was four weeks after the start date. Participants in the intervention group studied an online module entitled ‘Sport Psychology for Physiotherapists’. This module was split into three units and required approximately 12 hours of study. Participants in the control group studied an online module entitled ‘Strength and Conditioning for Physiotherapists’, which was similar to the module ‘Sport Psychology for Physiotherapists’ in terms of structure, length, delivery and assessment, but contained no sport psychology content.

The modules invited participants to complete three assessments and participate in the module forum and data was collected on participants’ engagement in these activities. Those successfully completing all three assessments were awarded a certificate of achievement.

Discipline/Conclusions

Preliminary data analysis suggests that studying the sport psychology module had a positive impact on the physiotherapists, with both attitudes towards and use of sport psychology improving following completion of the module. Most significantly use of sport psychology strategies was maintained during the middle 6 months following the completion of the module indicating a positive longitudinal effect.

Whilst referral to a sport psychologist was higher pre-module, this is most likely due to the preface. The pre-question related to whether they had referred an athlete to a psychologist ever (and thus could span a period of many years), whilst the post-questions related to whether any referrals had been made since studying the module (and thus only referred to ‘within 6 months’). There is some support for this in the qualitative data and in the increasing trend seen in the PIUS to POST3 stages (which is more marked for the psychology group).

Perceptions of the Module

Data was collected regarding participants’ perceptions of the module. Initially, immediately following completion of the module (POST1), participants were asked to rate how beneficial they found the module on a scale of 1-10. The ratings given by the participants are summarised below. The sport psychology group had a mode score of 8, with 77% of the group giving a score of 7 or above. The control group also had a mode score of 8, with 75% of the group giving a score of 7 or above.

References


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>POST1</th>
<th>POST2</th>
<th>POST3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sport Psych Group</td>
<td>12 (27.3%)</td>
<td>5 (9.1%)</td>
<td>6 (12.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>13 (25.5%)</td>
<td>3 (5.9%)</td>
<td>6 (11.9%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Perceptions of the Module – Dislikes:

• Time (n=8)
• Usefulness of topics (n=3)
• Other content-related issues (n=3)
• Technical issues (n=2)
• Ease of access/feasibility (n=7)
• Clarity (n=11)
• Other (n=4)

Perceptions of the Module – Likes:

• Usefulness of topics (n=3)
• Practical Application (n=9)
• Use of case studies/video clips (n=8)
• Encouraged reflection (n=3)
• Links to resources and further reading (n=4)
• General/other (n=2)
• Time (n=8)
• Forum (n=8)

Structure

• Levels/lock of depth (n=9)
• Other content-related (n=3)

Motivation for Further Study

On completion of the module, participants were asked if they were motivated to undertake any further study, either formal or informal, related to the topic they had studied. They were asked at 3-months and 6-months post completion of the module to undertake further study, which percentage of participants who planned to or undertook further study is shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>POST1</th>
<th>POST2</th>
<th>POST3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sport Psych Group</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>90.3%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
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