

Psychological Effects of COVID-19 on coaches' emotions. Competitive level differences



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Abstract

To investigate any possible relation between Sport Professionals (coaches) and COVID-19. More specifically, to examine if quarantine, affected their emotional status. To succeed that, the Greek version of the ERQ questionnaire was used. The collected questionnaires were 605. The results revealed differences in both variables among the sample. "Elite" coaches were more positive psychologically oriented than their "Non-elite" colleagues. Study results proved that in Greece also, professional sports level was affected by the Pandemic.

Keywords: ERQ, emotions; Coaches; Competitive level

Introduction

As the COVID-19 pandemic has spread all over the world, anxiety and stress has taken over the people, even the threat is real or not [1]. People's daily lives and routines have changed dramatically, due to the effects of COVID-19 in all areas of our lives. COVID-19 has been presented as a completely different infection, compared to all the others, and a unique threat to humanity. This increases pre-existing anxiety, causes panic, and promotes extreme emotional reactions [2].

There is general concern about increasing psychosocial instability, due to increased fear and reduced social and economic activities. Those who have experienced quarantine are more likely to develop mental disorders such as depression, guilt, and anger [3]. The psychological and social effects of COVID-19 have already occurred and are affecting people's mental health. This is not a temporary fad, but a condition that shakes people's mental health. Unfortunately, this risk is not temporary, but it is also related to people's mental health in the coming years [4,5].

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected people of all professions and social situations. The whole world of sports could not be unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic. International sporting and athletic events are canceled or postponed [6,7]. This means that the people of the sport - athletes, coaches, support staff - were found isolated in the home. More specifically, coaches, like everyone else, because of this restriction could not engage in their profession

and their athletes [8,9]. In addition to the usual competitive behavior and preparation for the next sporting challenge, new and completely restrictive living conditions combined with mandatory home confinement can harm the psychological well-being of athletes, coaches, and support staff [8].

The ERQ was developed by Gross' process model of emotion regulation [10]. It is a self-report questionnaire to assess emotion regulation [11]. The ERQ assesses two emotion regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal, an antecedent focused strategy, and expressive suppression, a response-focused strategy. While reappraisal permits, for example, thinking of the situation so as to alter its meaning and the emotional influence, suppression contributes to the inhibition and reduction of ongoing emotion expressive behavior [10]. On the one hand, reappraisal has been considered as an adaptive strategy and has been linked with adaptive patterns of affective management. On the other hand, suppression has been associated with lack of memory and poor social outcomes [12]. ERQ has been validated and used in many countries: Finland [13], Serbia [14], Greece [15], China [16], and Argentina [17].

Purpose of this study is to examine the psychological effects of COVID-19 on Greek National level coaches' emotions. More specifically, if the competitive level (elite and non-elite) differentiated the sample. This effort took place during the second and third waves of COVID-19. Uniqueness of the study is that there aren't previous papers about that theme at Greek territory.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 605 adult Sport Professionals (i.e., coaches). Following the classification used by for athletes, coaches were classified as “elite” 328 (54,2%) when working at the national and international levels, and “non-elite” 277 (45,8%), when working at the local and regional levels.

Materials

For the completion of the survey, the researchers used the Greek version [15] of the “Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, (ERQ)” [11]. The instrument consists of two dimensions and 10 items scored using a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The first dimension, labeled “Reappraisal” consisted of six items while the second dimension, “Suppression” consisted in the remaining four items.

Procedure

Research data was collected using an electronic form / questionnaire (Google Form), as the researchers considered its use mandatory in compliance with the new Coronavirus protection rules (COVID-19), avoiding unnecessary physical contact. Data collection period lasted three months (Oct-Dec 2021). The reason for selecting the specific period is related to the duration of the outbreak of COVID-19 and its mandatory inclusion, in Greece.

Result

The internal consistency of the factors was for (1) for “Reappraisal” .83, and (2) for “Suppression” .78.

In continuation, ANOVA analyses were conducted to find possible competitive level differences among coaches. The analyses revealed the following statistical significant differences:

a) For Reappraisal: $F_{1,604}=3,736$, $p < .05$. More specifically, the post hoc multiple comparisons Scheffe tests indicated differences between “Elite” coaches ($M=2,68$, $SD=.66$) and “Non-elite” ($M=2,50$, $SD=.66$).

b) For Suppression: $F_{1,604}=4,082$, $p < .001$. More specifically, the post hoc multiple comparisons Scheffe tests indicated differences between “Non-elite” coaches ($M=3,22$, $SD=.74$) and “Elite” ($M=3,012$, $SD=.79$).

Discussion

The results showed “Elite” coaches cope better with stress than non-elite ones. Even though that previous research indicated that higher competitive level might be associated more stressful conditions [18], on the other hand, elite professionals might work on highly structured sport teams and organizations were the professional support upon their work in highly focused [19,20], and they have developed greater abilities on coping with stressful situations [21,22]. Additionally, “Non-elite” coaches might have been working with athletes who divested from their athletic role [9]. As

Greece belongs to the sphere of western countries, this perception is very likely to have been adopted by Greek sport society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Possible limitations of the present study should be mentioned, such as the psychological state of individuals in such difficult and unprecedented circumstances. Therefore, follow-up investigations could focus on taking into behaviors in the upcoming months, provided that society has returned to its previous, “normal”, status.

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