

They Matter Too: Mental Health in the Athlete's Entourage

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Research demonstrates that elite athletes report mental health symptoms at or above those observed in the general population, with a range of sport specific and general life factors contributing to this risk. Less attention has been paid to the mental health of entourage (i.e. coaches and support staff) despite these individuals operating in the same environments and being subject to similar sport specific stressors, such as performance expectations, public scrutiny and abuse, and frequent travel. A recent scoping review of mental health in elite coaches indicated that most research has focused on burnout and wellbeing, with key determinants including workloads and job security. Fewer studies have focused on symptoms of depression, anxiety and substance misuse, with considerable variability in reported rates. For example, depression and anxiety symptoms have ranged from 14%- 44%, and risky alcohol consumption from 19%-48%. Only one study to date has examined mental health in high performance support staff (e.g. sports medicine physicians, physiotherapists, psychologists and psychiatrists, nutritionists and other allied health professionals), with 40% meeting probable 'caseness' for depression/ anxiety, 15.5% reporting 'high to very high' psychological distress and 39% risky alcohol consumption. Dissatisfaction with social support and life balance were key correlates of psychological distress and probable 'caseness'. While more empirical research is needed, existing evidence suggests that members of the entourage experience similar levels of mental health symptomatology to elite athletes and should therefore have access to mental health services and support programs. Addressing organizational factors related to excessive workloads, poor life balance and role instability are important to minimising risks of burnout or mental ill-health and to ensuring that the individuals supporting elite athletes have optimal wellbeing to perform their crucial roles.