

Exploring Eating Disorders in Sport: Coaching Knowledge and the Effects of the Pandemic

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Abstract : Background: The pandemic has caused a surge in eating disorders (ED). The prevalence of ED is higher in athletes than in the general population. It would therefore be expected that there will be a rise in ED among athletic populations. Coaches regularly work with athletes and should be in a position to identify signs of ED in their athletes. However, there is limited awareness of ED among coaches. Given the effects of the pandemic, it is crucial that coaches have the skills and knowledge to identify ED. This research will explore the effects of the pandemic on athletes, current knowledge of ED among coaches, and possible solutions for building back better from the pandemic. Methods: Freedom of Information requests were conducted, and a systematic review of the literature was undertaken regarding ED in sports and following the pandemic. Results: The systematic review of the literature showed that there had been a rise in ED in athletes due to the pandemic. Freedom of Information results revealed that ED is not covered in level 1 coaching courses. This lack of education has resulted in many coaches stating they feel unable to identify ED. Discussion: The increased prevalence of ED in athletes, coupled with the negative effects of the pandemic, highlight the need for action. Recommendations are provided, which include Level 1 coaching courses to include compulsory ED education, including signs and symptoms, what to do if an athlete has an ED, and resources/contacts. It is anticipated that the findings will be used to improve coaching knowledge of ED and support offered to athletes, with the overarching aim of building back better and faster from the pandemic.

Keywords : eating disorders, sport, athletes, pandemic

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