

The Relationship Between Organizational Stressors and Athlete Burnout in Soccer Players

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This study investigated the relationship between organizational stressors in sport and athlete burnout and involved a cross-cultural comparison of English and Japanese soccer players. Ninety-eight male players completed the Athlete Burnout Questionnaire (Raedeke & Smith, 2001) to determine levels of perceived burnout. Based on data reported in previous research, and the thresholds developed by Hodge, Lonsdale, and Ng (2008), 22 of the players were identified as exhibiting higher levels of perceived burnout. Nine members of this subsample (4 English and 5 Japanese players) were subsequently interviewed to explore the relationship between their experiences of burnout and the organizational stressors they encountered. Results revealed multiple demands linked to the dimensions of athlete burnout and identified specific organizational-related issues that players associated with the incidence of burnout. Cultural differences between English and Japanese players in terms of the prevalence and organizational stressors associated with burnout were also identified, with the main differences being the relationship with senior teammates and the coaching style.

Keywords: cross-cultural, football, performance, sport, stress

Organizational stress has been defined as “an ongoing transaction between an individual and the environmental demands associated primarily and directly with the organization within which he or she is operating” (Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2006, p. 329). Organizational stress in sport had been neglected in the research literature until Woodman and Hardy (2001) generated a theoretical framework that stimulated studies exploring the demands encountered by elite sport performers (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Hanton, Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005; Kristiansen, Halvari, & Roberts, in press; Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010; McKay,

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Niven, Lavalley, & White, 2008; Weston, Thelwell, Bond, & Hutchings, 2009). In developing this line of inquiry, Fletcher et al. (2006, in press-a) developed an alternative conceptual framework of organizational stressors in sport performers consisting of five general dimensions: factors intrinsic to the sport (e.g., training and competition load), roles in the sport organization (e.g., role overload), sport relationships and interpersonal demands (e.g., leadership style), athletic career and performance development issues (e.g., position insecurity), and organizational structure and climate of the sport (e.g., inadequate communication channels; cf. Cooper, Dewe, & O'Driscoll, 2001). Surprisingly, although researchers have begun to uncover the causes of the organizational stress process in sport, little is known about the potential consequences and outcomes, including burnout (Fletcher et al., 2006, in press-b).

Research interests in the concept of burnout originated in the professional domain (Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach, 1976) and then a decade later in the sport setting with the exploration of burnout among coaches (i.e., Caccese & Mayerberg, 1984). In more recent years, research attention in the sport literature has tended to focus on understanding athletes' experiences of burnout. Although historically there has been considerable debate and confusion surrounding how to define the phenomenon (Cresswell & Eklund, 2006c; Goodger, Gorely, Lavalley, & Harwood, 2007), a widely accepted definition of athlete burnout has emerged (Black & Smith, 2007). Maslach and Jackson (1984) defined burnout as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individual who work with people in some capacity" (p. 134). Raedeke (1997) modified this definition to describe athlete burnout as "a syndrome of physical/emotional exhaustion, sport devaluation, and reduced athletic accomplishment" (p. 398). Physical and emotional exhaustion (PEE) is conceived as a feeling of exhaustion and is commonly associated with intense training and competition. Sport devaluation (DV) refers to a loss of interest in or resentment toward one's own performance and sport. Reduced accomplishment (RA) describes when an athlete can no longer perform how they used to, or experiences a decrement with regard to their levels of proficiency (Raedeke, Lunney, & Venables, 2002).

Theoretical frameworks seeking to explain athlete burnout can be divided into stress-induced and nonstress induced perspectives (Raedeke, 1997). Stress perspectives of burnout have been more prevalent in the literature and assert that burnout is a consequence of a prolonged inability to cope with stress (Cresswell & Eklund, 2007b). However, although stress is an important component of the burnout process, Raedeke pointed out that "everyone can experience stress but not everyone who experiences stress burn out" (p. 398). He goes on to propose a sport commitment model of athlete burnout that suggests that burnout is a result of feelings of entrapment and "having to" rather than "wanting to" participate in sport. Alongside the commitment approach to athlete burnout, a second nonstress induced perspective has been proposed by Coakley (1992). Interestingly, his model is the only explanatory approach that highlights the potential role organizations play in the development of athlete burnout. Coakley suggested that athlete burnout is the result of identity foreclosure and the sense of a lack of control over one's life caused by the social structure of organized sport. A number of studies have supported the notion that the organization of sport can create climates associated

with higher incidences of burnout (e.g., Cresswell & Eklund, 2006b; Goodger, Wolfenden, & Lavalley, 2007; Gould, Tuffey, Udry, & Loehr, 1996). Moreover, a significant body of research exists within the occupational/work domain investigating the role of the organization in the experience of burnout. In a review of this literature, Cooper et al. (2001) identified a variety of organizational correlates of burnout including the management process, lack of communication between organizational levels, and role demands (see also Antoniou, Polychroni, & Vlachakis, 2006; Nyssen, Hansez, Baele, Lamy, & De Keyser, 2003). Pines (1993) argued that organizations have an important role in preventing burnout by optimizing the demands they impose on individuals and providing resources to help people achieve meaningful goals.

In view of the findings of the extant research, and the proposed link between organizations and burnout in terms of both cause and prevention, it is somewhat surprising that there have been limited studies devoted to this topic in a sport context. From a stress in sport perspective, research is needed to examine the potential effects of organizational stress on sport performers (Fletcher et al., 2006). Indeed, Fletcher and colleagues posed the specific questions, "What are the affective and emotional responses to organizational stress?" (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003, p. 193) and "What is the impact of organizational stress on athletic burnout?" (Fletcher et al., p. 30). Hence, researching this area in greater detail appears to be a worthwhile pursuit that has potential to extend both the organizational stress in sport and athlete burnout literatures and assist in the psychological preparation and support of sport performers.

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between organizational stressors and athlete burnout in soccer players. In addition, a secondary aim was to explore potential cultural differences in the experiences of organizational demands and athlete burnout in English and Japanese players. Understanding cultural nuances is important in the study and practice of sport psychology (Schinke, Hanrahan, & Catina, 2009), since Gill (2004) argued that cultures and their impact on individuals' cognitions and behavior is a critical aspect in gaining a deeper profundity about sport participation and performance. Indeed, according to Golembiewski, Scherb, and Boudreau (1993), burnout is a cross-national and -cultural disease. Significant cultural differences in the levels of burnout have been reported together with varying factors associated with its incidence (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Golembiewski et al., 1993). For example, Schaufeli, Martínez, Pinto, Salanova, and Bakker (2002) examined burnout and engagement in European university students and concluded that burnout differs from one country to another despite the similar higher education context. From a sport perspective, there is some evidence to suggest that burnout experiences and antecedents vary, depending on the situational and cultural context the athlete is in (Goodger, Gorely et al., 2007; Gustafsson, Hassmén, Kenttä, & Johansson, 2008). Cresswell and Eklund (2007b) observed that "comparisons across organizational cultures afford the opportunity to begin to examine propositions that burnout characteristics remain relatively consistent across settings even while antecedents and situational influences may vary" (p. 366). However, to date, this proposal has not been addressed, and there have been no cross-cultural comparisons of athlete burnout in the published literature.

Method

Mixed methods involving a quantitative questionnaire and qualitative interviews were used in this study. The data collection and analysis procedures were divided into two phases: (a) participant selection process and (b) interview procedure. The aim of the first phase was to identify sport performers who have experienced burnout. A common pitfall of previous burnout research has been the "healthy worker effect" (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998); that is, studies in this area have often unwittingly sampled healthy individuals who do not have burnout. In view of the primary purpose of this study, it was essential to ensure that the participants (for the second phase) had indeed experienced burnout. The aim of the second phase was to explore the relationship between organizational stressors and the dimensions of burnout. Qualitative interviews appear ideal for addressing this research question since they have been employed successfully in previous organizational stress (e.g., McKay et al., 2008; Weston et al., 2009) and athlete burnout (e.g., Cresswell & Eklund, 2007a; Gustafsson et al., 2008) research. They are well suited to capture the complexity of psychosocial phenomena and, in this particular study, the relationships between multiple stressors and burnout. Furthermore, Patton (2002) suggested that when the research topic is novel or under-researched, a qualitative approach facilitates a deeper insight into the issues surrounding the area. Before collecting the data, ethical clearance for the study was sought and received from the institutional ethical advisory committee.

Phase One: Participant Selection Process

The Athlete Burnout Questionnaire (ABQ; Raedeke & Smith, 2001) was used to assess burnout among potential participants. The ABQ is a self-report questionnaire that measures the three dimensions of burnout (i.e., PEE, DV, and RA) perceived by individuals in the month before completion. It is comprised of 15 items and three 5-item subscales designed to measure each dimension of burnout. Players responded to each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*). The ABQ was modified to be specific for the soccer population (i.e., changing "sport" to "soccer") and translated by the first author for Japanese potential participants. Raedeke and Smith provided acceptable internal consistency (alphas between 0.85 and 0.91), test-retest reliability ($r = 0.86$), and construct validity for the English version of the questionnaire (see also Cresswell & Eklund, 2005b, 2006a), although there is no available psychometric data for the Japanese version of the questionnaire. The alphas for the Japanese version of the questionnaire used in the current study were between 0.75 and 0.77.

The potential participants consisted of 98 male collegiate soccer players aged 18–23 years ($M = 20.25$, $SD = 1.20$). They were recruited from English and Japanese universities. English participants ($n = 50$) were drawn from a university that competes in the semiprofessional "Midland Combination League" and the collegiate British Universities and Colleges (BUCS) "Premier North League." The university team had won the national BUCS championship six times in the previous nine years. Japanese participants ($n = 48$) were drawn from two universities who compete in the collegiate "1st division Kyushu League." The players were contacted

individually or at team training sessions following permission attained through telephone or e-mail from team coaches. They were given verbal instructions for completing the questionnaire before its distribution.

Investigating athletes with higher scores on the ABQ helps obtain valid data regarding the experience of burnout, since they represent those who have experienced actual burnout (Gustafsson et al., 2008). The ABQ data collected in previous studies (e.g., Cresswell, 2009; Cresswell & Eklund, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a; Hill, Hall, Appleton, & Kozub, 2008; Raedeke & Smith, 2001) and the thresholds developed by Hodge, Lonsdale, and Ng (2008) were used to distinguish players with higher perceived burnout. More specifically, Hodge et al. developed higher burnout threshold criteria as 3.00 for PEE and DV and 2.70 for RA and lower burnout threshold criteria as 2.30 for PEE and RA and 1.60 for DV. Of the 98 potential participants, 22 (22.45%) reported higher scores on the ABQ subscales based on Hodge et al.'s thresholds and were contacted via telephone or e-mail and invited to participate in the interview phase of the study.

Phase Two: Interview Procedure

Participants. The interview sample was comprised of nine participants aged 20–22 years ($M = 20.89$, $SD = 0.60$). In terms of the subsample size, nine was considered an appropriate number because the participants began to recall analogous vignettes as the data collection in phase two progressed. Consequently, new themes failed to emerge from the analysis and it was deemed that both theoretical and data saturation had occurred (Biddle, Markland, Gilbourne, Chatzisarantis, & Sparkes, 2001; Bowen, 2008). A *t* test was conducted and revealed no significant differences in ABQ scores between the nine players who participated in phase two and the 13 players who did not. The English participants ($n = 4$) reported mean values of 3.20 for PEE ($SD = 0.40$), 3.15 for DV ($SD = 0.30$), and 3.25 for RA ($SD = 0.50$) on the ABQ, and the Japanese participants ($n = 5$) reported mean values of 3.16 for PEE ($SD = 0.26$), 3.48 for DV ($SD = 0.46$), and 3.36 for RA ($SD = 0.30$). Based on the approach adopted by Gould et al. (1996), each participant was presented with a definition of athlete burnout (i.e., Raedeke, 1997) and asked whether the definition was representative of their own personal experiences. All of the participants responded in the affirmative. Years involved in regular participation in soccer ranged from 10 to 16 years ($M = 13.22$, $SD = 1.99$), and the participants were either currently or recently retired (i.e., less than one year) from collegiate soccer.

Interview Guide. In the first instance, the authors reviewed the procedures employed in previous studies examining stressors (e.g., Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Hanton, Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005) and burnout in sport (e.g., Cresswell & Eklund, 2007a; Gustafsson et al., 2008). To fully investigate the participants' experience of organizational stressors in relation to burnout, the first author developed an interview guide based on literature from sport and organizational psychology with the assistance of the other authors who have experience in conducting interviews on stress and burnout in sport, respectively. The final guide contained seven sections: introduction; definitions; sport history and background; organizational stressors associated with PEE, DV, and RA; and conclusion.

Data Collection. Each participant was provided with a copy of the interview guide a week before the actual interview to help him consider his responses to the questions. The format of the interviews was semistructured and involved the participants being led through an identical set of questions and being asked them in a similar manner (Hanton, Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005; Weston et al., 2009). The order of the questions varied with the flow of the discussion depending on the responses of the participants (Patton, 2002), and an open-ended format was adopted to allow for exploration of novel areas and generation of rich data (Gustafsson et al., 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2003). The interactive element of the interview began with general questions to gain an insight into the participants' sport history and background. The participants were then asked questions such as "What do you think contributed to the development of each dimension of burnout?" during the three subsequent sections that sought to explore the links between organizational stressors and the burnout dimensions. A variety of prompts such as "Could you expand on . . . ?" were used to ensure an accurate and in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. At the end of each section, participants were asked if all of the relevant issues pertaining to the focus of that section had been discussed. Interviews were conducted face to face and arranged to take place at mutually convenient location. The conversations were digitally recorded, ranged in duration from 25 to 43 min ($M = 31.4$, $SD = 5.66$), and were transcribed verbatim, with the first author translating the Japanese interview transcripts into English.

Data Analysis. The authors read and reread all of the interview transcripts to become familiar with each of the participants' accounts. A combination of inductive and deductive content analysis was employed to analyze the data drawing on both existing theories and the study's data to identify the stressors related to each dimension of burnout. An organizational stressor was defined as "an environmental demand (i.e., stimulus) associated primarily and directly with the organization within which an individual is operating" (Fletcher et al., 2006, p. 329). Specifically, organizational stressors were deductively categorized with the aid of the Fletcher et al.'s (2006, in press-a) conceptual framework. The first author grouped together extracts of the transcripts that displayed similar thematic threads, and these subsequently developed into lower-order themes. This process was repeated and the themes progressed into hierarchically higher-order themes that were then located within one of the general dimensions. The emergent stressors logically aligned themselves with the categories in the framework so it was deemed redundant to attempt to create new labels. Inductive content analysis was then employed to examine the association between these stressors and each dimension of burnout. In addition, to more fully address the research question, the total number of mentions of stressors that were linked to burnout and the average number of participants mentioning individual stressors were calculated. Finally, trustworthiness of data were addressed by using multiple techniques (i.e., quantitative questionnaires, semistructured interviews, hierarchical content analysis, and use of quotes) to address the research question (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Contextual information is provided so that readers can attempt to determine the transferability of the results to other domains (Pitney & Parker, 2009), and consensus validation between the authors was sought at different stages of the analysis until agreement was reached.

Results

Phase One: Participant Selection Process

Descriptive data for the ABQ subscales are presented in Table 1. The table consists of mean values from previous research and the current study to facilitate comparison. Findings revealed that 22 of 98 (22.45%) of the potential participants scored above the thresholds of burnout, comprising 6 of 50 (12%) English and 16 of 48 (33.33%) Japanese players. Overall, the English players reported low to moderate levels of burnout across all dimensions of the ABQ and the Japanese players reported higher perceived burnout. *T* tests were conducted and revealed significant differences in ABQ scores between the English and Japanese players on PEE scores ($t = 3.97, p < .001, r = 0.38$), DV scores ($t = 5.56, p < .001, r = .49$), and RA scores ($t = 3.30, p = 0.001, r = 0.32$). It is also worth noting that the interview participants in this study scored considerably higher average scores across the ABQ subscales than previous research.

Phase Two: Interview Procedure

The results of the interviews derived from the data analysis procedures produced a total of 23 organizational stressors that were abstracted into 10 higher-order themes: training and competition load, training and competition environment, travel arrangements, nutritional issues, injury, leadership style, interpersonal demands, athletic career and performance development issues, organizational structure and climate of the sport, and roles in the sport organization. The remainder of this section is divided into two subsections to present the results of the interviews: (a) the relationship between organizational stressors and burnout and (b) cultural differences in the organizational demands associated with the incidence of burnout. For each higher-order theme of stressor, illustrative quotes representing a meaningful point are presented to allow the reader to better understand how each stressor is linked to burnout. To preserve the participants' anonymity, labels for each interviewee are used: English participants are denoted by EP1–4 and Japanese participants by JP1–5.

The Relationship Between Organizational Stressors and Burnout. Descriptive data for the interviews consisting of a summary of the organizational stressors linked to burnout dimensions are presented in Table 2. The table shows the links between each of the stressors and the dimensions of burnout and also allows for a comparison between English and Japanese participants by illustrating the frequency with which participants mentioned the stressor linked to burnout. In total, 20 distinct organizational stressors were linked to PEE, 18 linked to DV, and 12 linked to RA.

Training and competition load appeared to a significant issue surrounding the soccer players' lives since it was associated with the incidence of all the burnout

Table 1 Descriptive Data for the Athlete Burnout Questionnaire: Previous Research and the Present Study

	Athlete Burnout Questionnaire Subscales					
	PEE		DV		RA	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Previous Research						
Raedeke and Smith (2001; N = 208)	2.62	0.86	2.02	0.88	2.37	0.76
Cresswell and Eklund (2004; N = 199)	2.32	0.72	2.16	0.76	2.43	0.68
Cresswell and Eklund (2005a; N = 102)						
Pre	2.39	0.57	1.65	0.53	2.04	0.44
Mid	2.36	0.63	1.82	0.67	2.23	0.52
End	2.43	0.58	1.90	0.67	2.50	1.17
Black and Smith (2007; N = 182)	2.92	0.89	1.99	0.90	2.29	0.81
Hill, Hall, Appleton and Kozub (2008; N = 151)	2.28	0.81	1.86	0.92	2.35	0.69
Perreault, Gaudreau, Lapointe and Lacroix (2007; N = 259)	2.16	0.75	1.62	0.69	1.92	0.59
Cresswell (2008; N = 183)						
T1	2.82	0.71	1.90	0.70	2.38	0.59
T2	2.82	0.69	2.01	0.69	2.40	0.61
Hodge, Lonsdale and Ng (2008; N = 133)	2.76	0.63	2.00	0.70	2.35	0.57
Appleton, Hall and Hill (2009; N = 201)	2.25	0.81	1.66	0.77	2.10	0.67
Lonsdale, Hodge and Rose (2009; N = 201)	2.47	0.84	2.37	0.68	2.30	0.73
Present Study (N = 98)						
English participants						
Noninterviewed (<i>n</i> = 46)	2.16	0.66	1.64	0.70	2.31	0.61
Interviewed (<i>n</i> = 4)	3.20	0.40	3.15	0.30	3.25	0.50
Japanese participants						
Noninterviewed (<i>n</i> = 43)	2.84	0.91	2.64	0.92	2.76	0.66
Interviewed (<i>n</i> = 5)	3.16	0.26	3.48	0.46	3.36	0.30

Note: Pre = Pretournament (after 5–9 weeks of training), Mid = Midtournament (6–7 weeks after pretournament), End = End-of-tournament (12–13 weeks after pre-tournament), T1 = Time 1 (after 17 weeks of competition), T2 = Time 2 (after 29 weeks of competition).

Table 2 Descriptive Data for the Interviews: Organizational Stressors Linked to Burnout Dimensions in Soccer Players

General Dimension of Stressor	Organizational Stressor	Burnout Dimensions							
		PEE		DV		RA		Eng	Ja
		Eng	Ja	Eng	Ja	Eng	Ja		
Training and competition load	Hard training	4	5	3	2	1	2		
	Insufficient rest/amount of training	2	4	1	2	2	2		
Training and competition environment	Insufficient training facilities	0	3	0	2	0	0		
	Content of the training	1	1	2	2	0	0		
Travel arrangements	Travel time long	0	2	0	0	0	0		
Nutritional issues	Disordered eating	2	0	0	0	0	0		
Injury	Training with injury	2	2	1	2	2	3		
	Pressure due to injury	1	3	1	2	3	5		
Leadership style	Authoritarian coaching style	2	2	1	4	1	0		
	Relationship with coaches	0	1	2	0	0	0		
Interpersonal demands	Coaches having insufficient knowledge	1	0	1	0	0	0		
	Pressure from coaches	1	1	0	2	0	4		
	Conflicting information from coaches	1	1	0	2	0	0		
	Relationship with teammates	0	5	2	2	0	3		
	Poor group cohesion	1	0	0	0	0	0		
Athletic career and performance development issues	Conflicts within the club	1	0	0	0	0	0		
	Lack of belonging to the team	0	0	2	0	1	0		
	Position insecurity	2	0	1	2	1	1		
Organizational structure and climate of the sport	Perceived unfairness in the selection	3	1	4	2	0	0		
	Lack of communication between coaches and players	0	1	0	1	0	2		
Roles in the sport organization	Clique formation	2	0	1	0	0	0		
	Playing in different positions	0	0	0	1	2	2		
	Being team captain	0	0	0	0	3	0		
Total		26	32	22	28	16	24		

Note: Eng = English participants, Ja = Japanese participants.

dimensions. In particular, all of the participants cited "hard training" as a key stressor linked to PEE. Hard training, together with "insufficient rest," appeared to be linked to PEE and DV, as the following quote suggests:

I normally feel that [physical exhaustion] towards the end of the season, just where you are overloading your body and working so hard. I've got other things to deal with such as studying, and other things going on in life as well as football. So when people put that much physical stress on you, it drains you mentally as well. I feel a bit grumpy when I get tired or exhausted, feel like you don't want to do anything, you don't want to see your friends or you don't want to play football. I think you lose the drive to play football when you get to that point through football training. (EP4)

The "amount of training" (which detracted from the available leisure time) was linked to a lack of motivation (DV) as participants perceived no life outside soccer. This is summarized in the following quote:

I would link it [DV] to the amount of training that we were doing . . . coming back from school, having dinner, driving to training, training, driving back from training, and that's all my day is gone and that could be de-motivating, because not doing anything you wanna do in a time you've got. That often made me feel "I didn't wanna be at the training," and I'd be switching off at the training and it was sort of getting boring or tedious. (EP3)

Training and competition environment was linked to PEE and DV. The theme, "training content" was mentioned by some participants as a contributory factor to burnout and the quote below highlights how it has the potential to engender resentment (DV) toward soccer:

Having training for hours every day, it definitely de-motivated me in the sense that I didn't want to go to the training. At the end of each training session, we had fitness session and it was just exhausting and actually no one really wanted to do that. We obviously didn't have sufficient rest and it made me feel that I didn't even want to see footballs or wear boots. "I want no more football." (JP3)

In addition to the intensity, amount, and content of training, some of the participants also mentioned the timing of the training sessions, in particular the early morning sessions. This was linked to nutritional issues and DV, as this quote suggests:

You feel a bit of resentment towards the coaches for getting you up that early in the morning and making you feel tired throughout the rest of the day. I'm getting up at 6 a.m. three times a week, and that de-motivates me in a sense because I know that I'm not going to be properly rested. And it takes away from things like diet as well, you just feel like you haven't got as much time to eat or to prepare properly for games, prepare for training. I mean I rarely eat before training and especially at that time in the morning and when it gets to like 9 o'clock you're thinking, "Ah, I really could have done without that," you know. (EP4)

Injury was another prominent theme and a constant issue across all dimensions of burnout for most of the participants sampled in this study. Injury-related themes including "training with injury" and "pressure due to injury" were the most frequently cited organizational stressors associated with RA. One of the participants provided the following quote which described the link:

In my case injury was the main cause of reduced performance. My coach exerted pressure on me, and I had to start training before a full recovery. That injury got worse and I had to stop playing, but then I had to start training again. . . . It took me months to get out of this vicious cycle. As a matter of course my performance did not improve at all or even got worse during the period. (JP5)

The data indicate that "pressure due to injury" from coaches can also lead athletes into PEE and DV. Athletes cannot take a sufficient rest when injured due to the pressure associated with being dropped from the team and coaches saying, "if you rest then you're out." In relation to DV, this is evident in the following quote:

Because I was constantly injured, I felt the people were thinking that I was faking it. . . . I questioned my personal adequacy within the sport and within the team and I did receive a lot of pressure from the manager to say "come on toughen up" you know "just get through it," when I genuinely had injuries. So I had to play with injury several times. It only made things worse and I wanted to quit football. (EP1)

The theme of leadership style was associated with all the burnout dimensions and consisted of five stressors: "authoritarian coaching style," "relationship with coaches," "coaches having insufficient knowledge," "pressure from coaches," and "conflicting information from coaches." To illustrate, the following quote relating to RA provides an insight into the relationship between an authoritarian coach and soccer player:

I could not get along with my coach. He was too stubborn about his own way or his own policy to listen to our ideas. So he could not establish a relationship of mutual trust with us. As a result we, the players, didn't follow his policy and our performance got poorer and poorer, which produced a bad atmosphere in the team. (JP4)

Links between all the dimensions of burnout and stressors related to interpersonal demands such as "relationships with teammates," "poor group cohesion," and "lack of belonging to the team" were evident. The following quote illustrates how a feeling of not "belonging to the team" was linked to RA:

There were other people that were in the changing room that make you feel really insecure. I can still remember going into the changing room and just being sat there. . . . I had to sit next to one of my friends and just be quiet and not try to draw eye contact from some people (so that they didn't make a joke or so that they didn't pick on you). Part of that was because I was younger and maybe they felt threatened by new people coming in, but it always had a negative impact on my performance. (EP4)

In addition, another participant experienced a similar situation in which he moved to a new team and faced difficulty in communicating with other players. He continued playing but his teammates did not accept him so distance existed between them resulting in RA.

"Position insecurity" and "perceived unfairness in the selection" were the pertinent issues within career and performance development theme. Under the theme, the most frequently cited stressors linked to DV were "position insecurity" and "perceived unfairness in the selection." One of the English players stated,

There is lots of competition for places, so there is always in the back of your mind position insecurity. "Am I gonna be kept on at the end of this year?" There is always a pressure. . . . Obviously if you play bad then you think about the insecurity and I think that de-motivates and makes me feel a bit miserable at times because you think you are not doing enough. (EP3)

The perceived unfairness in the selection process was a constant issue for both English and Japanese players and appeared to be most strongly linked to DV. The following quote illustrates a participant's feeling when he perceived that there was unfairness in the selection process:

When I wasn't getting in the side, I was just thinking to myself "do I give up, do I move, or do I stay and fight?" and for a period I got to the point where I was thinking, "nothing I'm going to do here is going to change anything. . . . I'm not going to be able to play, I'm not going to be able to play better." (EP4)

Under the theme of organizational structure and climate of the sport, one of the English participants offered an insightful account of a "clique formation" in relation to PEE:

There were two or three groups of people within the team that were just doing their own thing and that was very, very frustrating. . . . They didn't really want to play for us but pretty much for themselves. At times it would feel like they were just passing to their friends or people within their group. Especially at training, it was very much like an us and them situation where you have their group and then you had the rest of us and there was a bit of a friction. I find it annoying when that happens because you all want the same thing and some people are kind of tripping you up. (EP4)

Another stressor cited was a "lack of communication between coaches and players." This led some of the participants into confusion as illustrated by the phrases such as "don't know what to do" and "don't know what is expected."

In the roles in the organization theme, "playing in different positions," led participants to lose motivation. Further, "being captain" was cited as a link to RA by all of the participants who had been a captain of their teams. This is evident in the quote below:

Every time I was captain, my performance dropped because I felt like I had too many roles and conflicting roles. . . . I never found the balance between trying to encourage my teammates or organize things and play for myself, so

whenever I was captain, I had about a season and a half where I was just struggling with form because I just didn't know what I should be doing, whether I should be standing there and organizing or getting involved and being quiet, and I never really struck that balance. (EP4)

Cultural Differences in the Organizational Demands Associated With Burnout.

Although there is clearly a need to exercise caution when interpreting and generalizing findings, the data indicate some cultural differences in the experience of organizational factors associated with burnout in English and Japanese athletes. One difference became apparent in terms of the "content of the training." Both groups of players reported having hard training for a long period as a cause of PEE; however, the Japanese players seemed to experience more severe training than the English players. This is illustrated in the following quote:

When I was in a high school, we lost an important game and couldn't go the national tournament. We had one month off-season training and it was so physically demanding. It was more like a punishment from coaches for losing that game. My body couldn't keep up with it and I wanted to quit the club. We trained everyday for about five hours without using balls; only running and running so I felt wiped out. (JP1)

All Japanese participants intimated "relationship with senior teammates" as linked with all of the dimensions of burnout whereas none of the English participants did. The following two quotes provide an insight into the relationship with senior players in Japan:

When I was young at high school, we often got pressured or punishment from seniors. There was a time when we played badly and lost the match, and for that, senior players made us [junior players] shave our heads. I think it's kind of a traditional thing that junior players can't go against the seniors so we only could do as we were told. (JP5)

We [junior players] couldn't express our own opinion to seniors, so even when we were told conflicting orders we just had to follow them. It surely led to having frustration or a loss of motivation toward soccer. I think everyone who has played soccer must have experienced this. . . . Seniors also pressurized and grumbled us for making mistakes. So we got scared or afraid of making mistakes, and as the result performance level dropped.

The participant also stated that traditionally in Japan, junior players attend training early, before the senior players, to prepare balls, water, goals, and the pitch, and after training they remain to clean up the pitch.

Another noteworthy cultural difference was the stressors related to coaches. For both English and Japanese participants an "authoritarian coaching style" was a particular stressor linked to PEE. The following quote is a participant's account of how an authoritarian approach employed by a coach led him to experience PEE:

The manager I've had, he'll ask you what you think the best team is, and then he'll go on and do his own thing anyway so it's kind of, it's frustrating in the

sense that he'll make you think that you have an input when really it's his choice. . . . I was just fed up with him. (EP4)

The difference emerged where 80% of Japanese participants cited "authoritarian coaching style" in relation to DV in comparison with only 25% of English players. The following quote demonstrates how coaching style, in this case the coach being unfair, led to DV:

I didn't like my coach and had some trouble with him. He was very unreasonable and unjust to me. For example, once he ordered us to do something, saying that he would not take us to away matches if we didn't follow his order. But we found out that he took someone to the game, though that player did not do as he commanded. After all whether he chose players as starting members depended on his likes and dislikes. He was very unequal and discriminatory. Because of that my motivation dropped. (JP5)

In addition, "pressure from coaches" as a cause of RA was cited by 80% of Japanese players, whereas none of the English did. The following quote is an example of the Japanese participants' experience of the situation.

My coach pressurized me that one mistake means dropping out from the squad in the next game. Because of this, I always looked for easy options not to make mistakes and this led to a loss of dynamic plays and poor performance. I even had a feeling of not being willing to play matches, I'd rather sit on the bench, and I was always scared of making mistakes whenever I played.

Finally, it seemed usual for Japanese schools to have more than 100 players in a soccer club, especially at the elite level. A reoccurring issue was that clubs typically only had one soccer pitch for use by all the club's players. Furthermore, they sometimes had to share the pitch with other sports clubs. In the United Kingdom, colleges and universities usually have numerous soccer pitches available to the clubs. Therefore, it makes sense that none of the English participants suffered from such circumstances. Some of the Japanese participants, however, suffered from having "insufficient training facilities," which was linked to DV:

There were more than 100 players in the squad, but we could only use half of the pitch. Obviously, you cannot train properly in that circumstance and training everyday with that was just frustrating. It made me de-motivated a lot and I often had a feeling of "Is it worth sacrificing other important things such as education?" (JP5)

Discussion

Through the use of the ABQ and interviews, this study explored the relationship between organizational stressors and athlete burnout in collegiate soccer players. Content analysis revealed sources of organizational stress that are linked to each dimension of burnout. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to incorporate a cultural comparison between English and Japanese soccer players. It is also worth highlighting that this paper addresses the sampling problem in burnout

research since all of the interview participants had experienced burnout, which enabled more robust conclusions to be drawn. Major organizational stressors that appeared to be linked to burnout were training and competition load, training and competition environment, travel arrangements, nutritional issues, risk of injury, leadership style, lack of social support, career and performance development, inadequate communication channels, and role overload. A clear and main finding to emerge from this study is that the experience of burnout is influenced by the psychosocial dynamics within sport organizations.

This study supports previous research that suggests that while situational and environmental demands leading to athlete burnout may vary, burnout characteristics remain relatively consistent across organizational cultures (Cresswell & Eklund, 2007b). In extending this finding, the results of the ABQ and interviews reported here reveal cultural differences in the prevalence of burnout between the English and Japanese in a sport context. Surprisingly, in comparison with the burnout incident rates previously reported in the sport psychology literature, 33.33% of Japanese and 12% of English collegiate soccer players met the thresholds of burnout (Hodge et al., 2008); however, these findings do parallel those reported in professional contexts. Golembiewski et al. (1993) reported that Japan has the worst distribution of burnout phases (i.e., the most severe) in comparison with U.S. and Canada, and Maslach et al. (2001) found the highest burnout incidences in Japan in comparison with European workers. The higher burnout incidence rate reported by the Japanese participants in this study can be explained by the interview data, which highlight some organizational stressors that appear peculiar to Japanese traditional, social, and cultural factors. These demands had a negative impact on Japanese athletes and appeared to be linked to the higher incidence of burnout in this group. Traditionally, coaches in Japan attempt to develop athletes' "konjo" by inducing physically exhausting training. Kozuma (2009), who has studied the culture of sport in Japan, remarked that

Many generations of [Japanese] athletes and coaches have been influenced by the notion of *konjo* . . . *Konjo* has been loosely translated into English as "guts" but it has a much deeper meaning, including high physical endurance, courage under adversity, and the tenacity to face pain and hardship for the good of the team. . . . Teams or athletes who did not succeed were reprimanded because they did not put in enough effort to show their *konjo* (i.e., did not practice enough, did not give it their all, or did not sacrifice enough). (p. 207)

In Japan, especially within high level university soccer clubs, it is common for coaches to develop training programs that focus on fitness training (i.e., running) for extensive periods of time with very little technical training. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that one of the Japanese participants in this study referred to his coach as a "God" and that coaches are afforded the utmost respect and their directions are obeyed without question. The interview data suggests the nature of the training programs and the manner with which they are delivered helps to explain the cultural differences in the prevalence of burnout between Japanese and English soccer players.

The stressor related to "relationship with senior teammates" was a recurring theme among Japanese athletes. Suffering from abusive behavior from senior

athletes was a cause of PEE and DV. In Japan, athletes who have a low status in the team (i.e., juniors) are reluctant to talk to anyone who has a higher status (i.e., seniors and coaches), and they are more willing to speak to their peers (Kozuma, 2009). For instance, at team training settings in Japan, junior athletes typically arrive before seniors, and training only begins only when the seniors arrive. Seniors and coaches are regarded as (the most) critical to team decisions. As some of the participants mentioned, the social hierarchy is perpetual in nature, persisting as a major, recurring cause of burnout among Japanese athletes. Athletes who suffer from this commonly engage in similar behavior patterns when they become a senior; that is, athletes accept these traditions and adopt them as their careers develop. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) explained this process in greater detail:

Any organisational culture consists broadly of long standing rules of thumb, a somewhat special language, and ideology that helps edit a member's everyday experience, shared standards of relevance as to the critical aspects of the work being accomplished, matter of fact prejudices, models for social etiquette and demeanor, certain customs and rituals suggestive of how members are to relate to colleagues, subordinates, superiors, and outsiders. Such cultural forms are so rooted in the recurrent problems and common experiences of the membership in an organizational segment that once learned they become viewed by insiders as perfectly "natural" responses to the world of work they inhabit. (p. 210)

In England, social hierarchy does exist but the impact of it on the athletes appears to be less pronounced than in Japan, particularly in the psychosocial context of athlete burnout. According to Schinke et al. (2009), English sport culture is individually minded that seems to foster a unique sense of self and autonomy, whereas Japanese culture is a collectivistic society that values the needs, wishes, and desires of groups over those of individuals. Although this assertion requires further examination, the notion of individualism and collectivism may be one of the explanations for the cultural differences in burnout.

Limitations and Implications

This study suffers from four main limitations. First, although this study provides alphas for the Japanese version of the ABQ, there are no other available psychometric data for this questionnaire. Second, it is important to emphasize that the findings may only be specific to the organizations and cultures sampled. It is, however, not unreasonable to assume that most sport organizations will have encountered similar issues that have been discussed. Third, the study is limited to collegiate soccer players. Although the results of this study suggest that a link exists between organizational stress and athlete burnout in nonprofessional athletes, it would be informative to gather data on professional sports. Previous studies examining organizational stress in sport (e.g., Fletcher & Hanton, 2003; Woodman & Hardy, 2001) and athlete burnout (e.g., Cresswell & Eklund, 2005a; Gustafsson et al., 2008) have tended to focus on elite athletes and have identified stressors that were not found in this study. For example, none of the players in this study cited "finance" linked to burnout but this stressor has been repeatedly identified as a pervasive demand

encountered by high-level athletes. Fourth, this study solely sampled male soccer players and future research should investigate the relationship between organizational stressors and athlete burnout in female athletes.

The findings and implications of this study reinforce the notion that athlete burnout is a multidimensional syndrome (Raedeke, 1997) and indicate that it stems from, among other things, the multifaceted organizational environment that surrounds athletes. In the future, a longitudinal study design will likely enable a deeper understanding of how athletes' experiences of organizational stress and burnout unfold and interact over time. In addition, unpacking the cognitive mechanisms that link environmental stressors and affective responses (i.e., *how* and *why* stress-related constructs are related to burnout) would further psychologists' knowledge of this area. This refers to the cognitive process of appraisal, individual differences in ability to manage stressors and responses (e.g., mental toughness, emotional regulation), and the coping strategies employed by athletes in response to negative stress reactions. As Fletcher et al. (2006) argued, there is a need for evidence-based interventions to help athletes develop specific coping strategies for organizational stress. Finally, investigating athletes' experiences from a range of different sports using similar methods will likely advance knowledge of this area. Since the number of athlete burnout studies has been limited in Japan (e.g., Nakagomi & Kishi, 1991; Yamamoto et al., 1999) and also in the UK, there is a need for further investigations to further explore how the sport culture impacts burnout.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the intention of this study has been to advance knowledge of the relationship between organizational stressors and athlete burnout in sport. The findings offer an insight into soccer players' lives and suggest that organizational stress is associated with burnout in this sport. Multiple stressors were linked to dimensions of burnout and some significant cultural differences of burnout experiences emerged. It can also be concluded that organizational variables affect the burnout levels experienced by soccer players. Finally, we posit that there is a need for psychologists to develop and acquire specific abilities to manage the potential impact of organizational stress on athletes. Athletes have little power to effect organizational changes in sport; therefore, for effective and long-term alleviation of burnout, fundamental changes in sport organizations and organizational environments may be essential to reduce the exhaustion experienced by athletes. Those who have power in an organization such as coaches, trainers, and managers should be aware of the potential symptoms and risks surrounding the athletes and monitor athletes' physical and emotional well-being.

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