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Abstract

Burnout can have various negative consequences for athletes. Despite the cognitive demands of elite sport, efforts to examine the cognitive underpinnings of athlete burnout remains scarce. Such cognitive foundations could include executive functions, a set of goal-oriented processes, including inhibition, updating and shifting. These processes are vital for enhancing athletes' ability to navigate, and excel within, the dynamic, ever-changing environment of elite sport. This raises the question of whether executive functions allow athletes to better manage the demands of elite competition and ultimately reduce the risk of burnout. The present study therefore aims to investigate the relationship between executive function and athlete burnout levels.

This ongoing study has adopted a quantitative cross-sectional design. A sample of 121 athletes from various sports will complete an online survey consisting of the Short Executive Function Scale (SEFS) and the Athlete Burnout Questionnaire (ABQ). Participants' level of athletic expertise will also be calculated in accordance with pre-defined criteria. Structural equation modelling will be performed on SPSS Amos to determine the association between SEFS scores and ABQ scores. It is expected that the results will indicate a negative relationship between executive function and athlete burnout levels. Specifically, athletes' inhibition, updating and shifting abilities will all be negatively associated with burnout subscales. It is also anticipated that this association will be more notable in those athletes reporting a higher level of athletic expertise.

The findings of this study could shed light on some of the cognitive factors associated with athlete burnout levels. This could allow competitors, coaches and practitioners to utilise training of such cognitive processes to enhance burnout management. The use of self-report measures to assess executive function opens the door for future research to expand understanding by measuring executive function objectively via validated cognitive test batteries.

Keywords

Athlete burnout, Executive function