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Psychological risk factors of a first hamstring strain injury in soccer: a qualitative study

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INTRODUCTION:

The Hamstring Strain Injury (HSI) is one of the most burdensome injuries in amateur and professional soccer teams. Numerous HSI risk factors have been identified, but few studies have considered the psychological risk factors. Although several theoretical models of sports injury psychology have been developed, they have not yet been applied to the context of HSI in soccer. The objective of this study was to determine the psychological risk factors of a first HSI in competitive males' soccer players.

METHODS:

In this qualitative study, we conducted semi-directive interviews with ten male competitive soccer players (age=19.8±2.6 years) who had sustained their first HSI within the past 6 years. The interview guide was based on the comprehensive model of injury causation of Barh & Krosshaug (2005). We investigated the dispositional, contextual and situational factors of the soccer players before their first HSI. Interviews were led by the same researcher who ensured the confidentiality of the data. Interviews were verbatim transcribed, coded line-by-line and first deductively organized into the guide's main categories by two of the authors, ensuring trustworthiness. Next, using an inductive approach, all authors triangulated the data and brought out new subcategories.

RESULTS:

Participants had common dispositional psychological risk factors, including at-risk personality traits (e.g., perfectionism, external health locus of control), an obsessive passion for soccer with competitive motivational goals, strong athletic identity, poor health literacy, and maladaptive health-related behaviors. They were exposed to a controlling coaching context with a fear of negative staff evaluation, and had recently undergone injuries or life stressors. When injured, all athletes were in positive psychological states. They faced different situational factors (e.g., match, training overload), experienced positive or negative physical states, and were highly engaged in the activity (e.g., sprint).

CONCLUSION:

These results helped to specify the comprehensive model of Barh & Krosshaug (2005) in the context of HSI in soccer, while providing a broader identification of psychological risk factors. From a preventive perspective, results suggest the need to moderate the controlling coaching style and thus lower the fear of negative staff evaluations, enhance the players' health literacy, and build their autonomy.

Topic: Psychology

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