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Stress and perfectionism among male and female age-specific national team players in football, handball, and ice-hockey

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Introduction. Junior elite age-specific national players are expected to be future senior elite players. These expectations come with pressure both from the player him/herself and from significant others in their development environment. This study investigated how national team players (male and female) in football, handball, and ice-hockey in Norway experienced stressors (global score) (SG) and how the two perfectionism dimensions evaluative concerns (EC) and personal strivings (PS), as well as playing time (club), and an overload injury impact on SG. We also controlled for gender, age, sport, and playing level of the players. **Methods.** The sample in this study was 274 male and female (45,6% female and 54,4% male) (players selected to an age-specific national team of U16-U19, (M=16.23, SD=1.06). Cronbach's alpha was calculated to test the scale reliability of the factors; SG (=.88), EC (=.76), PS (=.79). A linear regression analysis was conducted with SG as the dependent variable. **Results.** The regression model explained 19% of the variance in SG and turned out statistically significant ($p<.001$). EC ($p<.01$) and overload injury ($p<.05$) had a significant positive association with SG, while playing time had a significant negative ($p<.01$) association on SG. Women scored significant ($p<.01$) higher on SG. There was no significant difference in PS, age, sport, and playing level on SG. **Discussion.** To be evaluated, both by yourself and others, is a natural part of being in a talent development environment. However, if a player has (or develops) evaluative concerns one needs to be aware that this might increase their level of overall stress. Finding PS not to be associated with SG is interesting. One might expect that players scoring higher on personal strivings also would score higher on stress. One explanation of our findings could be the sample of national team players, where all players naturally are striving for being a better athlete. Another explanation could be that being evaluated (of others) is more stressful than your own strivings. Furthermore, it is important that talented athlete's significant others (i.e., coaches, parents) are aware that both reduced playing time and experiencing overload injury increases a player's level of stress.

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