Sport Psychology Training in APA-Accredited Counseling Psychology Programs: There is More Room at the Inn

J. Andy Walsh, Trent A. Petrie, Macey Arnold, Carmyn Hayes, Dalton L. Mack

University of North Texas

INTRODUCTION

• Sport psychology (SP) is an academic discipline and profession that has evolved over the years from research grounded within motor learning and development (Gardner & Moore, 2006) to the application of psychological skills and principles to enhance athletes' and teams' sport performances (Williams & Straub, 1998).

• Because of the growing impact that athletes' psychological well-being may have on skill development and performance (Beable et al., 2015; McGraw et al., 2018) and the recent emphasis on athlete mental health (MH) within sport organizations (NCAA, 2016), some sport psychologists have argued for a more integrative and holistic approach when working with athletes – one that is grounded in MH and counseling/clinical psychology (Petrie & Harmison, 2012).

• With this growth, training in psychology – specifically in MH assessment and treatment – is becoming necessary for ethical and competent SP practice, yet has not been studied in more than 25 years (Petrie & Watkins, 1994).

Purpose

• The purpose of this study was to obtain a contemporary view of students' and faculty's interests and involvement in SP research, practice, and graduate education within APA-Accredited Counseling Psychology (CP) doctoral training programs.

METHOD

Participants

- 52 Training Directors (TDs), or their designate, from APA-accredited Counseling Psychology programs (TDs = 49; Graduate Students = 2; Research Supervisor = 1)
- We requested no other participant demographic information

Instruments

- Survey based on Petrie and Watkins (1994)
  - **Current status of SP in CP programs**
    - YES/NO questions if offered non-practicum or practicum SP course, or specialization in SP
      - Answered follow up questions based on response
  - **Engagement in SP activities**
    - YES/NO questions if program faculty were engaged in SP
      - Research, teaching, supervision, consulting
    - YES/NO questions if graduate students were engaged in SP
      - Research, non-prac course, prac course, specialization in SP
    - Provided acceptability and feasibility of these activities (See Table 1)
  - **Perceptions of SP's current standing in psychology**
    - TDs' perspectives of various SP-related issues
      - Which area should SP graduate training occur?
      - Within which discipline is SP a specialty?
      - Should the term "sport psychologist be restricted to licensed professionals?
    - Provided brief rationale and additional comments

RESULTS

Current Status of Sport Psychology in Counseling Psychology Programs

- CP programs with SP involvement
  - 15.4% (n = 8) offered a SP non-practicum course
    - *Faculty credentials*:
      - Licensed Psychologist (LP; n = 6)
      - Current/working toward Certified Mental Performance Consultant, AASP (CMPC; n = 7)
      - Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC; n = 1)
  - 19.2% (n = 10) offered a SP practicum course
    - *Faculty credentials*:
      - LPs (n = 8)
      - CMPCs (n = 7)
    - *Practica placements established by:*
      - Faculty (n = 6)
      - Practicum coordinators (n = 3)
      - Program students (n = 1)
    - *Practica requirements:*
      - Weekly class meetings (n = 7)
      - Weekly supervision with faculty (n = 9)
      - Weekly peer supervision (n = 2)
      - Monthly class meetings with faculty (n = 1)
      - Case study presentations and online discussions with peers (n = 1)
    - *Competitive level of athletes with whom students worked:*
      - Youth sport (n = 4)
      - High school (n = 4)
      - Sports clubs/academies (n = 3)
      - College (n = 9)
      - Professional or elite/Olympic (n = 2)
      - Sport injury rehabilitation clinic (n =1)
    - *Hours spent across different SP practicum activities (Mean):*
      - Giving mental skills workshops (M = 1.00)
      - Attending practices (M = 1.80)
      - Attending competitions (M = 1.60)
      - Meeting individually with athletes for sport/performance (M = 3.33)
      - Meeting individually with athletes for MH (M = 5.50)
      - Meeting individually with coaches (M = 0.67)
      - Attending practicum class (M = 1.17)
      - Attending individual supervision (M = 0.86)
  - 15.4% (n = 8) offered a SP specialization
    - Variability in number of credits required (range = 15-48) and number of semesters of SP experiences (range = 1-8)
    - Other sport science courses sometimes required
- CP programs with no SP involvement
  - 84.6% (n = 44) did not offer a SP non-practicum course
    - 88.6% had no plans to introduce into their curricula in next 2 years
    - 47.7% offered elsewhere on campus, 27.3% did not know
  - 76.9% (n = 40) did not offer a SP practicum course
    - 97.5% had no plans to introduce into their curricula in next 2 years
    - 67.5% offered elsewhere on campus, 30.0% did not know
  - 78.8% (n = 41) did not offer a SP specialization
    - 90.2% had no plans to introduce into their curricula in next 2 years
    - 68.3% offered elsewhere on campus, 29.3% did not know

Engagement in SP Activities

- Faculty
  - Research: 23.1% (n = 12)
  - Teaching: 15.4% (n = 8)
  - Supervision: 19.2% (n = 10)
  - Own consulting/private practice: 13.5% (n = 7)
- Graduate Student
  - Research: 36.5% (n = 19)
  - Enrolled in non-prac SP courses: 28.8% (n = 15)
  - Enrolled in SP practica: 23.1% (n = 12)
  - Specializing in SP: 36.5% (n = 19)
- *Acceptability vs. Feasibility*
- SP activities viewed as significantly more acceptable than actually feasible
  - Conducting SP research:
    - $t[44] = 3.586$, $p = .001$
  - Enrolling in non-prac SP course:
    - $t[44] = 4.513$, $p < .000$
  - Enrolling in SP practica:
    - $t[44] = 5.413$, $p < .000$
  - Specializing in SP:
    - $t[44] = 4.770$, $p < .000$

Perceptions of SP's Current Standing in Psychology

- 42.3% - SP is a specialty area within psychology
- 36.5% - SP is a specialty area within an interdisciplinary degree
- 73.1% - Term "sport psychologist" should be restricted to those licensed to practice psychology
- 67.3% - Students who want to practice ethically in SP should be trained within psychology
- Open-ended responses:
  - Ethical & competent SP practice should include training in psychology and sport & exercise science
  - Practitioners should be able to distinguish between MH and performance concerns
  - Term "sport psychologist" should be restricted to licensed psychologists in order to protect the public, follow state licensing law, and be consistent with academic training

TABLE 1

Acceptability and Feasibility of Engagement in Sport Psychology-Related Activities As Rated by APA-Accrediting Counseling Psychology Training Directors (N = 52)

Type of Sport Psychology-Related Experience	Acceptability M (SD)	Feasibility M (SD)
Faculty		
Developed a non-practicum course (n = 8)	7.00 (0.00)	-
Developed a practicum course (n = 9)	7.00 (0.00)	-
Developed a specialization (n = 8)	6.63 (1.06)	-
To develop a non-practicum course (n = 42)	5.19 (1.57)	-
To develop a practicum course (n = 40)	4.95 (1.54)	-
To develop a specialization (n =41)	4.44 (1.50)	-
Engaging in research (n = 48)	6.13 (1.42)	-
Engaging in teaching (n = 48)	5.81 (1.59)	-
Engaging in supervision (n = 48)	5.71 (1.75)	-
Engaging in their own consulting/practice (n = 48)	6.10 (1.51)	-
Graduate Students		-
General View on Conducting Research (n = 47)	6.15 (1.50)	5.23 (1.87)
-Master's Thesis (n = 49)	6.71 (1.72)	-
-Doctoral Dissertation (n = 49)	5.82 (1.59)	-
-Independent research project (n = 49)	6.18 (1.38)	-
Enroll in a non-practicum course (n = 47)	6.09 (1.67)	4.55 (2.15)
Enroll in a practicum course (n = 47)	5.64 (1.94)	3.89 (2.35)
Specialize through coursework & applied training (n = 47)	5.85 (1.63)	4.49 (2.06)

*Note: Results are on a scale from 1 (*Not at all Acceptable/Feasible*) to 7 (*Completely Acceptable/Feasible*)

DISCUSSION

Implications

- Applied psychology TDs often are surveyed to obtain information about their programs, and our response rate was high (~70%), thus our data likely represent the general attitudes, opportunities, and involvements that exist within CP programs
- Despite similar limitations found by Petrie and Watkins (1994; limited programmatic resources, demanding training requirements), there are more SP opportunities and involvements for faculty and students
- SP practica experiences were extensive and in-depth, appeared similar to CP practica in terms of hours, supervisor credentials, and other details (Hatcher et al., 2015)
- Doctoral students' SP involvement occurred both in and outside of formal opportunities within CP programs
- Acceptability of student interest in SP involvement was significantly higher than feasibility – while faculty are open to students being involved, practicality/viability is low because of existing requirements, lack of resources, etc.
- Our data indicate that SP currently is being viewed as more professionally aligned with psychology than other fields for various reasons (e.g., perceptions of competence, ethics of practice, protection of the public)
- Unfortunately, many students are left to pursue SP training on their own due to lack of opportunities
- Because SP maps well onto CP's philosophy, values, and training structures, we remain hopeful that even more CP programs will find ways to integrate SP into their curricula, cementing its place as a specialty in psychology

REFERENCES

References

- Beable, S., Fulcher, M., Lee, A. C., & Hamilton, B. (2017). SHARPSports mental health awareness research project: Prevalence and risk factors of depressive symptoms and life stress in elite athletes. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport, 20*(12), 1047-1052.
- Gardner, F. L., & Moore, Z. E. (2006). *Clinical sport psychology*. Human Kinetics.
- Hatcher, R. L., Wise, E. H., & Grus, C. L. (2015). Preparation for practicum in professional psychology: A survey of training directors. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 9*(1), 5-12.
- McGraw, S. A., Deubert, C. R., Lynch, H. F., Nozzolillo, A., Taylor, L., & Coohen, I. G. (2018). Life on an emotional roller coaster: NFL players and their family members' perspectives on player mental health. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology, 12*(3), 404-431.
- National Athletic Training Association. (2020) *Mental Health*. https://www.nata.org/practice-patient-care/health-issues/mental-health
- Petrie, T. A., & Harmison, R. (2012). Sport psychology in the field of counseling psychology. In E. Altmaier & J. I. Hanson (Eds.), Oxford Handbook of Counseling Psychology (pp. 780-806). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Petrie, T. A. & Watkins, Jr., C. E. (1994). Sport psychology training in counseling psychology programs: Is there room at the inn? *The Counseling Psychologist, 22*(2) 335-341.
- Williams, J. M., & Straub, W. F. (1998). Sport psychology: Past, present, future. In J. M. Williams (Ed.), *Applied sport psychology: Personal growth to peak performance* (3rd ed., pp. 1-12). Mayfield.