"I realised it was a different kind of culture to other sports": An exploration of sport psychology service provision and delivery in Gaelic games

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21   **Abstract**

22   In this article, we present two studies that provide the first evidence on sport psychology services

23   in Gaelic games. In Study 1, 36 participants providing support for mental aspects of performance

24   in Gaelic games completed a survey that ascertained an initial insight into practitioners and the

25   services they provided in this context. Findings of Study 1 suggested considerable engagement with

26   psychology support in Gaelic games, but also highlighted a range of challenges with service

27   delivery. In Study 2, we interviewed 11 sport psychology consultants to understand the active

28   ingredients that contribute to context-driven sport psychology in Gaelic games and the role of

29   contextual intelligence. Findings from Study 2 offered insights into how participants shaped their

30   services to the context and how the active ingredients for effective service delivery, including

31   working alliances, buy in, and engagement with individuals within the performance environment,

32   could be enabled or constrained in this context.

33   **Keywords**: sport psychologist; accreditation; professional development; supervision; coaching.

Introduction

34

35   Successful applied sport psychology service delivery involves much more than knowledge

36   of specific interventions – it also demands understanding of: how a sport environment operates;

37   why this is the case; and how a sport psychology consultant (SPC) can fit into, and deliver services

38   successfully within, that environment (Schinke & Stambulova, 2017). Context, defined as the events

39   and processes that characterise a specific situation and influence behaviour (Reber, 1995), is integral

40   to effective service delivery and can have significant, wide-ranging impacts for SPCs. As Schinke

41   and Stambulova (2016) point out, context has the potential to inform the "*what* (i.e., content), *how*

42   (e.g., strategies, tools, assessment instruments), and *why* (e.g., theoretical frameworks, "local"

43   research, professional philosophy)" of how practitioners work with their clients (p. 56). Although

44   there is a recognised need to consider context in the delivery of applied sport psychology services

45   (Storm & Larsen, 2020) and a SPC's services should be context-sensitive to be effective (Cotterill

46   et al., 2016), the role of context in applied sport psychology service delivery is often overlooked

47   (Hacker & Mann, 2017). To better understand the role of context in applied sport psychology, we

48   explored the delivery of sport psychology services within a specific context – Gaelic games.

49   **Gaelic Games**

50   Gaelic games are traditional Irish sports played in over 2000 clubs in Ireland and more than

51   450 clubs across the globe (GAA, 2023). Three national governing bodies (NGB) are responsible

52   for governing Gaelic games; the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) governs the sports of men's

53   Gaelic football and hurling (a stick and ball game), as well as handball and rounders; camogie, the

54   women's equivalent of hurling, is governed by the Camogie Association; and the Ladies Gaelic

55   Football Association governs ladies Gaelic football. Gaelic games have a community-driven,

56   volunteer ethos. Club-level activity seeks to foster participation and nurture a lifelong commitment

57   to Gaelic games, while the 'talent' and 'elite/high performance' pathways aim to support players to

58   reach their potential and attain excellence at inter-county level (i.e., regional), the elite level of the

59   sports (GAA, 2022). Amateurism is central to Gaelic games, but the time being invested by inter-

60   county players is considered generally to be on par with professional athletes; these players often

61   dedicate over 30 hours per week to their sport (Kelly, 2018) and are considered "professional in

62   most respects except the capacity for rest" (Moran, 2001, p. 280). The government provide funding

63   to inter-county players to aid their development and recognise their contribution to Irish society,

64   while the financial outlay for preparing teams for inter-county competitions is also significant, with

65   over €2 million (>$2.2 million US) spent by some counties in 2022 (Cormican, 2022). Thus, despite

66   its amateur ethos, there are parallels between elite, inter-county Gaelic games and other (semi-

67   )professional sports nationally and internationally due to the elite performance pathway, competition

68   structures, and significant amounts of time being invested by players.

69   Sport psychology services have been provided in Gaelic games for at least 25 years

70   (MacIntyre et al., 1998) and more than one in two players at inter-county level have reported regular

71   access to sport psychology support (Gaelic Players Association [GPA], 2023). While sport

72   psychology is key to player development at all levels, as detailed in the framework for sports science

73   produced by the Gaelic Games Sport Science Working Group (GGSSWG; Lane et al., 2023), no

74   published literature exists on applied sport psychology within Gaelic games (Author 1 et al., under

75   review). This lack of evidence is problematic, especially for trainees, who express a desire to know

76   more about applying knowledge and skills learned in the contexts they practice in and how to

77   overcome challenges encountered (Hutter et al., 2015). Based on literature that has developed on the

78   psychology of Gaelic games (Author 1 et al., under review), SPCs working in these sports are likely

79   to encounter unique challenges due to cultural, structural, and contextual features of Gaelic games.

80   For instance, researchers have suggested that susceptibility to burnout could be heightened due to

81   limited off-season periods (Turner & Moore, 2016) and the intense, professional-like demands at

82   the elite level (Hughes & Hassan, 2017). Likewise, Sheehan et al. (2018) proposed that student-

83   athletes who play at inter-county level could face more intense demands compared to elite student-

84   athletes in other sports, as they could line out for multiple teams (i.e., club, university, and inter-

85   county) during the academic year (Sheehan et al., 2018). With these idiosyncrasies in mind,

86   investigating sport psychology service delivery in Gaelic games could provide new insights into

87   what services SPCs deliver in this context, how they deliver them, and if and how their services are

88   sensitised to context.

89   **The Field of Sport Psychology in Ireland**

90   Given the importance of professional accreditation and ensuring the quality of services in

91   sport psychology (e.g., Keegan & Cotterill, 2020; Schinke et al., 2018), we provide a brief overview

92   of the Irish sport psychology landscape, the main location in which Gaelic games are played. In

93   Ireland, differences exist in sport psychology credentialing, with the topic being one that has

94   recently come under scrutiny in the media (Kearney, 2023). In Northern Ireland, the term "sport

95   and exercise psychologist" is protected by the UK's Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC),

96   but there is no such protection in place in the Republic of Ireland. Thus, a practitioner in Northern

97   Ireland can embark on a training pathway to legally use the term "sport and exercise psychologist",

98   but there is no legal protection for this term in the Republic of Ireland. The Sport Ireland Institute

99   (SII) provides accreditation for individuals offering sport science support, including in psychology,

100   to elite Irish athletes based on certain criteria (i.e., Masters qualification in a discipline, 1600 hours

101   of service delivery, one case study), yet this pathway falls short of other sport psychology

102   credentialing systems internationally (e.g., BASES, FEPSAC - Schinke et al., 2018) due to the

103   absence of a supervision requirement. As the situation in the Republic of Ireland regarding

104   credentialing and quality control is not dissimilar to many other countries, an investigation of sport

105   psychology in Gaelic games could have implications that transcend Ireland, as professional bodies

106 around the world without formal sport psychology accreditation could be encouraged to reflect on

107 the adequacy of the current systems that they have in place and be inspired to develop appropriate

108 guidelines and standards of practice.

109   **The Research**

110   In this article, we present two studies conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of applied

111 sport psychology service delivery in Gaelic games as part of a larger programme of research

112 undertaken to aid the development of a sport science framework for Gaelic games (Lane et al.,

113 2023). We adopted a co-design approach, whereby academics collaborated with members of the

114 GGSSWG to design the project. Partnering with relevant knowledge-users can improve research

115 quality by producing better research questions, creating novel and conceptually richer knowledge,

116 and enhancing impact (Smith et al., 2023). The co-design process involved meetings over a 6-month

117 period between the: first author, who herself was a Gaelic games player and had extensive

118 knowledge of the sport psychology landscape in Ireland; second author (GGSSWG chair); and

119 GGSSWG's sport psychology sub-group lead. Through this process, we developed a research

120 agenda that addressed the needs identified by the GGSSWG and that could extend theoretical and

121 applied understanding of sport psychology service delivery.

122   In Study 1, we sought to provide the first analysis of sport psychology provision in Gaelic

123 games. Our objectives were to: (a) profile the field of practitioners providing support for mental

124 aspects of performance in Gaelic games; (b) establish what services these practitioners are providing

125 and how these are being delivered; and (c) explore their perceptions of, and views on, sport

126 psychology in Gaelic games. In Study 2, we sought to further explore applied sport psychology

127 practitioners' experiences of delivering services to understand the role of context for sport

128 psychology service delivery in Gaelic games. These studies complement each other, helping the

129 reader to gain insight into the practitioners providing psychological support in Gaelic games, the

130   services they provide, and how these are delivered. In turn, the findings could add to theoretical

131   understanding of applied sport psychology by documenting interactions among factors that

132   influence service delivery (e.g., SPC, athlete, relationships, and context). In addition to having

133   applied implications for sport psychology in Gaelic games, the findings could be transferable

134   (Smith, 2018) to other contexts that share similarities with Gaelic games, such as sports with a

135   development pathway and those that maintain an amateur ethos despite having (semi-)professional-

136   like performance environments. Furthermore, the combined findings from Study 1 and 2 could

137   allow people in other contexts to reflect on their situation and consider how they might adjust

138   services.

<div align="center">**Study 1**</div>

140   **Methods**

141   In Study 1, we used an online survey to collect data about the participants' backgrounds and

142   professional practice, and to explore their general views on sport psychology service delivery in

143   Gaelic games. Data were collected within an interpretivist framework (Tamminen & Poucher,

144   2020), as we focused on exploring participants' experiences and perceptions of sport psychology in

145   Gaelic games.

146   *Participants and Recruitment*

147   Informed by our co-design meetings, individuals providing "support for mental aspects of

148   performance" in Gaelic games were invited to take part in Study 1 in March-June 2022. This

149   terminology was used purposefully to reach a diverse range of practitioners, spanning registered

150   practitioner sport psychologists to individuals providing what would be regarded as sport

151   psychology services under other titles, which occurs in other countries (Sanchez et al., 2005;

152   Feddersen & Ryom, 2022). Following ethical approval from the first author's institution, we

153   recruited eligible participants via: (a) an email sent to all 30 Sport Ireland Institute (SII) practitioners

154 accredited in psychology, academics responsible for coordinating postgraduate programmes in sport

155 psychology in Ireland, all three Gaelic games NGBs, and a player representative body (GPA); and

156 (b) a recruitment message posted on the first author's social media profiles. Thirty-six participants

157 consented and took part (female $n = 15$, male $n = 20$, male and female $n = 1$; $M = 40.89$ years, SD

158 $= 9.37$). All participants described themselves as White and were mainly White-Irish ($n = 32$).

159 ***Materials***

160   We designed the survey (available on request) to collect data on: (a) *the practitioners'*

161 *backgrounds* (education, experience, professional accreditation status, title used – the *who*); (b)

162 *their professional practice* (information on services delivered in Gaelic games; continuous

163 professional development [CPD]; and personal values, theoretical paradigm, dominant model of

164 practice, intervention goals, and intervention techniques and methods - Poczwardowski et al., 2004

165 – the *what, how*, and *why*); and (c) *their general views on service delivery in Gaelic games* (views

166 on regulation, education, and accreditation; and service delivery problems – the broader *context*).

167 Members of the GGSSWG's sport psychology sub-group reviewed and pilot tested the survey

168 before distribution.

169 ***Data Analysis***

170   Data analysis was led by the first author. Frequency statistics were calculated for closed-

171 ended questions in the survey. Qualitative data in relation to the practitioners' personal values (1385

172 words) and their views on problems with service delivery in Gaelic games (771 words) were

173 analysed using three phases of content analysis (*preparation*, *organisation*, and *reporting*; Elo &

174 Kyngäs, 2008). After familiarising herself with the dataset via multiple readings of the responses

175 (preparation phase), the first author systematically coded relevant text segments inductively

176 (organisation), labelling these comments using brief phrases. For example, segments of text within

177 the response, "Time to do both workshops and individuals meetings. I tend to get access for

178   workshops but limited on 1:1's", were coded as "lack of time for delivering services" and "lack of

179   access to players". The first author then grouped similar codes into sub-categories. For instance, the

180   codes "poor engagement from coaches" and "getting buy in" were clustered together within the sub-

181   category "engagement challenges". This same process was then repeated to develop categories. To

182   give an example, the sub-categories "being siloed" and "engagement challenges" were combined

183   within "integration, engagement, and access issues". The first author shared her initial analysis with

184   the fourth author, who acted as a 'critical friend' (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Although the degree

185   of "insiderness" or "outsiderness" is fluid and contingent on time, place, and social context (Allen-

186   Collinson, 2013), the first author considered herself an "insider" to Gaelic games, whereas the fourth

187   author, who had no prior experience in Gaelic games, regarded themselves as an "outsider". The

188   fourth author's position enabled him to pose critical questions that encouraged the first author to

189   articulate more clearly why the findings held particular meaning in the context of Gaelic games

190   (e.g., Why might access be such a pronounced issue in Gaelic games?) and how they connected to

191   the literature on applied sport psychology. In the last phase (reporting), the first author wrote up the

192   analysis, with illustrative quotes used to facilitate the voice of participants and relevant literature

193   drawn upon to link the findings to applied sport psychology more broadly.

194   ***Rigour***

195   In Study 1, we took several actions to enhance rigour. First, collaborating with members of

196   the GGSSWG to design the study allowed us to draw upon a wealth of experiential knowledge not

197   available within the academic literature and to develop contextually-sensitive research that could

198   address the needs of relevant parties in Gaelic games, thus ensuring that the research was relevant,

199   timely, and could make a significant contribution (Tracy, 2010). Second, in our analysis, we sought

200   rich rigour by engaging in critical friends' discussions (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Finally, before

201   submitting the research for peer review, we shared a summary of findings with the GGSSWG's

202   sport psychology sub-group in written and oral presentation formats and invited questions and

203   feedback. The group communicated that the findings were informative and resonated with their

204   experiences, which enhanced our confidence in the credibility of the research.

205   **Findings and Discussion**

206   *Practitioner Backgrounds*

207   More than two-thirds of participants had under 1000 direct contact hours of service delivery

208   experience in sport (< 249 hours = 25.00%; 250-499 hours = 11.11%; 500-749 hours = 19.44%;

209   750-1000 hours = 13.89%), with 11 participants (30.55%) having more than this. Most participants

210   (52.78%) had under four years of experience in Gaelic games, with the remainder having 5-9 years

211   (22.22%) or ≥ 10 years (25.00%) of experience. One-third of participants held a bachelor's degree

212   in either sport science (or a related discipline) ($n = 12$) or psychology ($n = 12$). The majority of

213   participants had a minimum educational qualification in sport psychology or psychology to Masters

214   (73.53%) or doctoral level (25.00%). Two participants did not have a university-level degree, with

215   one completing a short online course and another having no formal qualification. These findings

216   parallel previous research in Belgium (Sanchez et al., 2005) and Denmark (Feddersen & Ryam,

217   2022) by indicating that individuals providing support in Gaelic games have varied educational

218   backgrounds and that some do not possess relevant qualifications.

219   Nineteen participants (52.77%) held some form of accreditation and/or registration, with the

220   most common being the SII ($n = 15$; representing 50% of practitioners in the country with this

221   accreditation), followed by the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI; $n = 7$), British Association of

222   Sport and Exercise Science (BASES; $n = 3$), and British Psychological Society (BPS; $n = 3$). Only

223   52.94% ($n = 9$) of non-accredited participants ($n = 17$) were pursuing an accreditation, thus

224   suggesting a relatively high proportion of participants are practicing in Gaelic games without

225   accreditations of any form and are not pursuing these. Therefore, despite the presence of

226 credentialing systems in Ireland and in the region (e.g., FEPSAC), many are not engaging with

227 these. The most used title was "sport psychologist" (38.89%), followed by "performance coach" or

228 "mental skills coach" (27.78%) and "sport/performance psychology consultant" (13.89%).

229 ***Professional Practice***

230 At the time of the study, participants were working over a sustained period of time (i.e.,

231 more than the occasional once-off workshop) with 97 teams across Gaelic football, ladies Gaelic

232 football, hurling, and camogie. Most of these teams were male (>64.95%) and performing at adult

233 club-level (>50%). Nineteen participants reported that they were providing support to adult inter-

234 county teams (52.77%), 15 worked with adult club teams (41.67%), and eight delivered support to

235 youth inter-county teams (22.22%). Most reported that engagement with adult inter-county teams

236 was at least weekly (57.89%), whereas support at club or youth inter-county levels tended to be

237 fortnightly or less often (≥ 80.00%). Most reported that they were not interviewed for the role

238 (64.44%) nor had a contract in place (94.44%) for the team they worked with most. Among

239 participants reporting information on service charges, the average rate was €77.77/hour ($86.19 US;

240 *SD* = €41.64, $45.94 US) for individual consultations (*n* = 27) and €225.86/hour ($250.31, *SD* =

241 €185.07, $204.18 US) for group consultations (*n* = 29).

242 We synthesized findings related to professional practice according to levels in the model of

243 professional philosophy proposed by Poczwardowski et al. (2004). Forty-nine different *personal*

244 *values* were reported, with person-centred (e.g., athlete-centred, client-centred) being the most

245 endorsed. The most widely adopted *theoretical paradigm* was cognitive-behavioural (*n* = 19),

246 followed by eclectic (*n* = 5), behavioural (*n* = 4) and humanistic (*n* = 4). For services that

247 participants provided in sport in general (i.e., not exclusive to Gaelic games), the most prevalent

248 *dominant model of practice* reported was a collaborative approach (i.e., draws from multiple

249 models) (*n* = 16), followed by psychological skills training (PST; *n* = 12) and a counselling model

250 (*n* = 6). Within Gaelic games, PST was most widely used (*n* = 17), followed by a collaborative

251 approach (*n* = 13). Based on differences in the dominant model of practice, this suggests some form

252 of adaptation to services within Gaelic games. Table 1 outlines frequency statistics for *goals of*

253 *services*, *intervention techniques and methods*, and *modes of intervention delivery*.

254 **Table 1**

255 *Goals of services, intervention techniques and methods, and modes of intervention delivery in Gaelic games*

Category (completed responses)	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)
Goal of service					
Performance enhancement (35)	0.00	0.00	2.86	60.00	37.14
Team effectiveness (35)	0.00	0.00	25.71	42.86	31.43
Personal growth/development (35)	0.00	8.57	22.86	37.14	31.43
Daily living (35)	2.86	5.71	22.86	48.57	20.00
Mental wellbeing (36)	2.78	0.00	38.89	33.33	25.00
Health and healthy lifestyle (36)	2.78	8.33	30.56	41.67	16.67
Organisational service (34)	14.71	23.53	44.12	17.65	0.00
Individual interventions[1]					
Individual goal setting (36)	2.78	2.78	22.22	44.44	27.78
Self-talk (35)	2.86	5.71	8.57	57.14	25.71
Breathing (36)	2.78	5.56	22.22	44.44	25.00
Pre-performance routines (35)	0.00	2.78	33.33	44.44	19.44
Imagery (35)	5.71	5.71	28.57	54.29	5.71
Strengths-based practice (35)	8.57	8.57	25.71	42.86	14.29
Motivational interviewing (36)	19.44	13.89	30.56	27.78	8.33
Mindfulness (36)	8.33	27.78	22.22	30.56	11.11
Progressive muscular relaxation (36)	16.67	13.89	38.89	30.56	0.00
Skill acquisition/motor control (34)	14.71	26.47	29.41	23.53	5.88
Acceptance and commitment therapy (36)	27.78	19.44	30.56	16.67	5.56
Rational emotive behaviour therapy (36)	31.43	17.14	31.43	14.29	5.71
Hypnosis (34)	97.06	0.00	0.00	2.94	0.00
Group-level interventions					
Group cohesion (34)	2.94	0.00	23.53	52.94	20.59
Team goal setting (35)	2.86	0.00	28.57	48.57	20.00
Teambuilding (35)	0.00	2.78	38.89	44.44	11.11
Leadership development (35)	5.71	5.71	42.86	37.14	8.57
Organisational/cultural change (36)	2.78	11.11	30.56	47.22	8.33
Mode of intervention delivery[2]					
Group consultations with players (36)	0.00	2.78	22.22	44.44	30.56
Individual consultations with players (36)	2.78	0.00	19.44	50.00	27.78
Group consultations with management/coaches (36)	2.78	8.33	30.56	33.33	25.00
Group consultations with players and management/coaches (35)	2.86	8.57	28.57	40.00	20.00
Individual consultations with management/coaches (36)	5.56	8.33	30.56	38.89	16.67

Note: (1) Five practitioners reported reflective tasks (e.g., journaling) as intervention strategies; (2) Other service delivery modes reported in free-text responses included interactions with the multi-disciplinary team (*n* = 2) and parents (*n* = 2).

256   Twenty-eight participants (77.77%) reported they were the main provider of support for

257 mental wellbeing, including mental ill-health, in their typical Gaelic games service delivery

258 experiences. Of these 28 participants, only 23 (82.14%) reported that they referred clients if they

259 presented with mental ill-health, with none of the participants who did not refer clients reporting a

260 clinical background. Given that the prevalence of symptoms of common mental disorders has been

261 reported to range from 23% (adverse alcohol use) to 48% (anxiety/depression) among elite Gaelic

262 games players (Gouttebarge et al., 2016), education and training is needed to ensure that appropriate

263 support is provided to individuals who present with mental health issues and that practitioners

264 understand the boundaries of their practice, and know how and where to refer clients.

265   Professional development activities most regularly endorsed included engagement with

266 written or digital resources and reflective practice (Table 2). Supervision is considered vital for CPD

267 in applied sport psychology (Sharp et al., 2021) but over one-third of participants, 50% of whom

268 were accredited with the SII, never engaged in supervision, and less than one-quarter of the overall

269 sample engaged in supervision on an at-least-monthly basis. The lack of supervision engagement

270 could be due to several reasons, including the absence of regulation of sport psychology in the

271 Republic of Ireland (and thus training pathways that involve or teach supervision) and lack of formal

272 supervision requirements. Overall, the findings are somewhat comparable to past (Watson et al.,

273 2004) and more recent evidence (Feddersen & Ryam, 2022) concerning supervision engagement,

274 which is concerning as supervision is considered integral for safeguarding the quality of applied

275 sport psychology (Sly et al., 2020).

276 **Table 2**

277 *Frequency statistics for engagement in continuous professional development activities.*

Form of continuous professional development	Never (%)	Less than once per year (%)	1-3 times per year (%)	4-6 times per year (%)	Monthly (%)	Weekly (%)
Reading journal articles or books	0.00	0.00	2.78	5.56	38.89	52.78
Digital resources (e.g., podcasts)	2.78	0.00	11.11	8.33	25.00	52.78
Reflective practice	2.78	11.11	8.33	5.56	36.11	36.11
Interactions with peers/colleagues/students	0.00	0.00	27.78	16.67	30.56	25.00
Interactions with other sport science support personnel	2.78	8.33	22.22	8.33	22.22	36.11
Courses or training	5.56	11.11	19.44	50.00	8.33	5.56
Experiential learning	16.67	11.11	16.67	13.89	22.22	19.44
Attending conferences	13.89	27.78	5.56	52.78	0.00	0.00
Supervision	38.89	25.00	0.00	13.89	19.44	2.78
Role play	44.44	30.56	0.00	13.89	8.33	2.78

278   *General Views on Service Delivery in Gaelic Games*

279   **Views on Regulation.** Most participants were *very unsatisfied* ($n = 11$; 30.55%) or

280   *unsatisfied* ($n = 14$; 38.89%) with regulation of sport psychology in Gaelic games. Illustrating

281   underlying issues, one participant said, "With no formal training route in Ireland for Sport and

282   Exercise Psychologists, anyone can provide the support. There are a lot of people doing the work

283   of a Sport Psychologist under the title 'Performance Coach', especially ex-players" (Participant 35).

284   More than 75% felt there should be accreditation for sport psychology at adult inter-county ($n = 30$;

285   83.33%) and youth inter-county levels ($n = 28$; 77.77%), with more than half reporting similarly for

286   adult club ($n = 23$; 63.89%) and youth club levels ($n = 20$; 55.55%).

287   **Service Delivery Problems.** Three categories represented problems described by

288   participants when delivering services in Gaelic games. First, *integration, engagement, and access*

289   *issues* were widely reported*.* Many participants referred to insufficient contact time with players,

290   which reduced the potential impact of their work. Other problems were "buy in" and isolation:

291   [There is] A lack of understanding of what sport psychology is and how it can work in practice,

292   and a hands-off approach from coaches and managers. All see it as important but don't know

293   how or want to integrate it. It's a separate entity or takes too much time from other physical,

294   technical, tactical parts of sessions. (Participant 9)

295   Getting buy in from coaches (Zakrajsek et al., 2013) and integrating sport psychology with other

296   services (Wylleman, 2019) is important for effective sport psychology service delivery, but a lack

297   of buy-in from coaches can result in sport psychology services being siloed, unintegrated, and

298   underutilised. Second, *misunderstandings and misperceptions about sport psychology* were also

299   reported. As one participant put it:

300   There remains a negative attitude among former players from a certain generation that the use of

301   sport psychology is for "weak" players, and they don't see the value in it. Navigating your role

302   when this attitude exists can be very challenging. This can most likely be down to a lack of

303   education about the benefits and uses of sport psychology. (Participant 8)

304 More broadly, participants reported a lack of knowledge among coaches, players, administrators,

305 and the media as problematic, especially with regards to regulation. Finally, *negative attitudes and*

306 *stigma towards seeking support* were described. Athletes are less open to psychological support

307 after negative experiences (Wrisberg et al., 2009) and several highlighted difficulties with

308 "undoing" the effects of negative experiences, including poor professional practice delivered by

309 "unqualified people", which some felt increased wariness and reluctance to seek support.

Transition from Study 1 to Study 2

311   Study 1 provided the first empirical insights into sport psychology services being provided

312 in Gaelic games (the *what, how*, and *why*), the people delivering these services (the *who*), and their

313 general views on sport psychology service delivery in this context (the *context*). To expand

314 understanding of sport psychology in Gaelic games and to support the development of professional

315 practice, there is a need to explore how SPCs deliver services effectively within (the constraints of)

316 this context, particularly in light of the challenges highlighted in Study 1. Context-driven sport

317 psychology (CDSP) was recently introduced as a term in the applied sport psychology literature

318 (Schinke & Stambulova, 2016, 2017) and refers to the ways in which SPCs' practices are shaped

319 by the reciprocal interactions between SPCs, their clients, and the broader (sub)cultural contexts

320 they are part of (Stambulova & Schinke, 2017). To deliver CDSP services, a practitioner should

321 possess contextual intelligence, described as the "ability to learn, reflect upon, understand, and take

322 into account the cultural contexts involved in working with clients" (Schinke & Stambulova, 2017,

323 p. 133). Brown et al. (2005) proposed that for an applied sport psychology intervention to be

324 successful, it must be in a client's "language" and reflect their view of the "reality" of an athletic

325 context, which necessitates knowledge of its structure, patterns, attitudes, and means of influence.

326   To become a contextually-intelligent practitioner, a SPC should immerse themselves in the various

327   contexts in which they deliver their services to understand its most influential and important factors

328   (Storm & Larsen, 2020).

329   To illuminate the role of contextual intelligence in shaping the active ingredients (those

330   factors that contribute to positive service delivery outcomes) of CDSP, in Study 2, we aimed to

331   explore SPCs' experience of CDSP service delivery in Gaelic games to understand the active

332   ingredients that contribute to their practice and how these are influenced by the context of Gaelic

333   games. To achieve this, we used a narrative approach, placing the stories and experiences of SPCs

334   at the centre of our analysis to answer the following research questions: (a) What can stories of

335   delivering applied sport psychology services in Gaelic games tell us about the active ingredients of

336   CDSP?; and (b) What do the stories tell us about the role of contextual intelligence in CDSP? By

337   exploring SPCs' stories of service delivery in Gaelic games, we sought to provide insight that could

338   help to train more contextually-intelligent practitioners and inform the development of a *contextual*

339   *map* (Brown et al., 2005). A contextual map provides a mid-level theoretical account of a

340   phenomenon underpinned by data (Jamal et al., 2015), thereby advancing knowledge, and can

341   inform practitioners' reflections on their practice, both for those delivering services in Gaelic games

342   and those in other contexts. For example, practitioners in other contexts can reflect on the

343   similarities and differences between the contextual map and their own situations as a way to identify

344   strategies to enhance their athlete collaborations.

Study 2

Methods

347   Our second study adopted a narrative approach, grounded in a relativist ontology and

348   subjectivist/transactional epistemology (Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). Narrative inquiry is a

349   psycho-social approach concerned with the study of narratives, which are the cultural and social

350   resources that people draw upon to structure, give meaning to, and interpret experiences in their

351   own and others' lives over time (Smith, 2016). As narratives can illuminate information about an

352   individual's world, while at the same time impart information about socio-cultural dimensions of

353   life (Riessman, 2008), a narrative approach had the potential to generate valuable knowledge about

354   the lived experiences of CDSP among SPCs, within the socio-cultural context of Gaelic games.

355   ***Participants***

356   Whereas Study 1 sought to capture a wide range of individuals providing support for mental

357   aspects of performance in Gaelic games, in Study 2, we sought to recruit accredited individuals or

358   those pursuing some form of accreditation as a way of ensuring participants were delivering

359   theoretically-grounded and community-sanctioned applied sport psychology services.

360   Consequently, we specified that participants were eligible to take part if they: (a) had an educational

361   background in sport psychology to at least Masters level; (b) were working with a team on a

362   sustained basis; (c) reported that they had some form of accreditation or were pursuing

363   accreditation; and (d) consented in Study 1 to be contacted about a follow-up interview. Eight males

364   and three females from Study 1 who held ($n = 7$; SII accreditation $n = 6$; SII accreditation and HCPC

365   registered practitioner psychologist $n = 1$) or were pursuing ($n = 4$) an accreditation provided

366   informed consent to partake in Study 2. Adapting professional development categories (Rønnestad

367   & Skovholt, 2013), we recruited four novices (≤ 5 years' experience), four experienced practitioners

368   (6-14 years' experience), and three experts (≥ 15 years' experience). The amount of direct contact

369   hours of experience of delivering applied sport psychology in sport varied, such that we interviewed

370   participants across the entire career lifespan (< 500 hours $n = 2$, 500-749 hours $n = 4$, 750-1,000

371   hours $n = 2$; > 1000 hours $n = 3$).

372   *Data Generation*

373   In this study, we generated data through a narrative interview approach (Jovchelovitch & Bauer,

374   2000). Before the online interviews, participants prepared a timeline of service delivery in Gaelic

375   games and another for a team they had worked with for at least one season. Two open-ended

376   questions were posed by the first author: (a) "can you tell me about the journey of your consulting

377   experiences in Gaelic games?"; and (b) "can you tell me a story about your consulting experiences

378   in a Gaelic games team?" Both questions were purposefully broad to enable participants to tell their

379   stories. Although the second question sought a story about one team, in many cases, stories about

380   multiple teams were told. Throughout the interviews, the first author adopted the role of active

381   listener, moving *with* each participant's story and making note of preliminary and tentative ideas

382   about the stories shared (Smith, 2016). After the uninterrupted main narration of stories, the first

383   author posed curiosity-driven questions (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000) to elicit more detail. All

384   interviews were audio recorded and lasted 81.45 minutes on average.

385   *Data Analysis*

386   We analysed the interview data using thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008; Smith &

387   Sparkes, 2016). After transcribing the interviews, the first author engaged in indwelling by re-

388   listening to the interviews, re-reading her notes, and undertaking multiple readings of the transcripts.

389   During this stage, the first author identified stories of service delivery to be analysed within each

390   transcript. As participants generally provided multiple stories, we analysed "bigger" stories, which

391   focused on a season or multiple seasons with a team, and "smaller" stories *within* these stories,

392   which included specific consultations with a client or matches that a SPC provided support at, for

393   example. After identifying the stories, the first author coded data concerning the active ingredients

394   of service delivery in Gaelic games. Given our interest in CDSP and contextual intelligence,

395   particular attention was directed towards contextual features that shaped, or were shaped by, how

18

396 the SPCs delivered their services. After writing a content summary for each story, the first author

397 shared their analysis with the fourth author, who had listened to the interviews and read several

398 transcripts. Through several meetings, we discussed the analysis and interrogated links within and

399 across the stories for each participant (Smith, 2016). To generate our narrative themes, we asked

400 questions like, "What are the common active ingredients across the narratives of sport psychology

401 practice?" and "How are these active ingredients shaped by the context of Gaelic games?" While

402 interpreting the dataset and answering these questions, we also considered previous research on

403 active ingredients of sport psychology service delivery (Tod et al., 2019). After shifts back and forth

404 between the transcripts and overarching analysis, we refined our results. Writing was considered a

405 central element of our analysis rather than an activity that took place after 'completing' our analysis

406 (Smith, 2016), with this process helping to further develop our interpretations. For example, the

407 third author, who had no prior experience in Gaelic games, encouraged the first author to make the

408 context of Gaelic games more prominent in the representation of findings to ensure that the

409 contextual detail and idiosyncrasies shone through.

410 **Rigour**

411 In conducting this study, we sought to enhance rigour in several ways. First, collaborating

412 with members of the GGSSWG ensured that we designed a study that could help to address the

413 needs and priorities of the field of sport psychology in Gaelic games. Based on these collaborative

414 discussions, we designed Study 2 to develop evidence that could inform guidance for sport

415 psychology service delivery in Gaelic games, in line with the Gaelic games sport science framework

416 (Lane et al., 2023). Second, by directing analytic attention towards practitioners' stories of

417 providing sport psychology services within a specific sporting context, we sought to make a

418 significant contribution to theoretical and practical understanding of the active ingredients of CDSP

419 and contextual intelligence in applied sport psychology. Third, we sought to produce a research

420   report that was credible by offering thick description of the participants' accounts via illustrative

421   quotes. Finally, we aimed to enhance rigour through the processes of data collection and analysis.

422   For example, we conducted lengthy interviews (> 80 minutes on average) with 11 practitioners (i.e.,

423   > 30% of participants in Study 1) who had different levels of consulting experience in Gaelic games.

424   More so, the rigour of our analysis was improved by engaging in critical discussions (Smith &

425   McGannon, 2018) as a research team.

426   **Findings and Discussion**

427   Participants across the sample reported that delivering services in Gaelic games was unique.

428   As one novice SPC put it when reflecting on their first experience in Gaelic games, "I realised it

429   was a different kind of culture to other sports I had worked in. And, I suppose as with any sport, it

430   had a different kind of culture and ethos" (Novice SPC 1). To unpack the nuance and complexity

431   of CDSP in Gaelic games and address our research questions, we present our findings in two

432   sections. In section 1, we describe contextual factors that shaped the CDSP services delivered by

433   participants. This provides insights into the contextual backdrop for the active ingredients of CDSP

434   portrayed in section 2. In detailing the active ingredients of CDSP, we highlight the role of

435   contextual intelligence in shaping services delivered by participants.

436   *Contextual Factors Shape Context-Driven Sport Psychology*

437   **Variation in models of practice.** Despite similar local contexts, participants described

438   different approaches to service delivery. These variations were largely due to resource constraints

439   (e.g., limited budgets), although in some instances, the SPC's approach to service delivery was

440   shaped by the agreement reached between the SPC and coach(es) and the degree of collaboration

441   (or not). Generally, approaches to CDSP differed depending on (a) how immersed a SPC was (i.e.,

442   immersed, outsider, or "on call") and (b) how the SPC worked with the coach (e.g., integrated, co-

443   operative, practitioner-led, collaborative, or did not work with the coach). Examples of immersed

444   service delivery were generally described within male, adult inter-county teams and could generally

445   be classified as either: (a) immersed and integrated, whereby the SPC attended training, worked

446   with players, was integrated within the coaching and support team, and worked with and through

447   the coach; or (b) immersed and co-operative SPC-coach relationship, which involved the SPC

448   attending training, working directly with players, and generally operating separately to the

449   coach(es). When SPCs operated as outsiders, a practitioner-led approach, typically characterised by

450   an SPC delivering group sessions on an infrequent basis to players, was most common. In contrast,

451   one SPC shared a story of working on a limited budget as an outsider with a male, adult club team

452   in which a collaborative SPC-coach relationship helped to maximise impact. In this case, the SPC

453   delivered workshops to the players monthly or less often, but the coach reinforced and infused these

454   learnings into the team environment. The SPC felt this was possible as "the culture had already

455   bought in [to sport psychology]" and because "He [the coach] was so clear…He had the ability to

456   follow up on it [sport psychology workshops] and had the vision for where he wanted the team to

457   go. He could then implement it while I wasn't there" (Experienced SPC 3). Finally, one SPC

458   described an on-call and athlete-dependent service (i.e., no engagement from coaches), but uptake

459   was poor.

460   **Time as a constraining factor.** Participants discussed the impact of time constraints on how

461   they delivered sport psychology services in Gaelic games. Although access to players was often

462   constrained due to lack of funding, even SPCs who were fully immersed within a team environment

463   described difficulties with getting time to work with players. Whereas professional sport

464   environments can afford an SPC time to engage with athletes and coaches, the amateur status of

465   Gaelic games made this difficult. When comparing their experiences of working in Gaelic games

466   to other professional sports, one SPC reflected on how "coaches [in professional sports] were more

467   interested in filling the players' time rather than leaving them free, which was kind of the opposite

468   in GAA. They [coaches] were more interested in utilizing what time they had, and then they were

469   gone" (Expert SPC 3). Illustrating the difficulties with gaining access, one SPC described a typical

470   training night with a male inter-county team and the narrow window of time available to undertake

471   consultations:

472   I was conscious at the start that getting access to the players is just so difficult. So, you're

473   training 8.00pm, you're off the pitch at 9.30pm. Players are travelling from all around the

474   country. Like, the time is so limited. Sometimes you've got 20 minutes for a one-on-one, if

475   you're lucky, and if your players are there for 7.00 p.m. (Experienced SPC 3)

476   Due to the time constraints, there was a need for a flexible, context-driven, and time-efficient service

477   to maximise impact. Beyond arranging sessions with players to fit around training, other strategies

478   the SPCs used to get time with players included taking players aside during training sessions, with

479   the coach's permission, and online individual meetings.

480   **The influence of coaches' knowledge.** The impact of sport psychology knowledge among

481   coaches soliciting support from participants was widely discussed. Many felt that knowledge of

482   sport psychology among coaches was generally lacking, both in terms of the possibilities and

483   parameters of a SPC's role and the time needed for their services to have an impact. For instance,

484   one practitioner spoke about how "80% of the phone calls I get are looking for a quick fix" and how

485   they had been mistaken for a counsellor or, in some cases, a motivational speaker:

486   The amount of phone calls I've got recently being like, "championship is in three weeks' time.

487   Can you come out and give a talk?" And I have to try and explain to so many people, "I'm not

488   a motivational speaker." (Experienced SPC 1)

489   As described in the above example, a lack of knowledge about sport psychology was often described

490   in the initial interactions between Gaelic games coaches and an SPC. Some participants felt that this

491   could be attributed to coach education and the lack of psychology content on these courses. In

492   reflecting on their involvement in Gaelic games and comparing it to soccer, Experienced SPC 2

493   said:

494   They [Gaelic games coaches] have to understand the disciplines and how they work together.

495   Now, I'm not saying all soccer coaches are good at that. They're certainly not. But I think they

496   might have a better appreciation of it because they've had to go through a certain education

497   pathway. I know the GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) have their pathway, but I don't think

498   it's as robust compared to the soccer education pathway.

499   For some, particularly novice SPCs, the lack of knowledge among coaches contributed to a lack of

500   role clarity and underutilisation. This was shown in one example shared by a novice SPC when

501   working with a male club team: "I don't think the manager had enough experience or was too keen

502   on having a sports psychologist there because he didn't know what I did and there was never the

503   forum for having a sit-down discussion" (Novice SPC 1). Due to deficits in knowledge among some

504   coaches, participants had learned the importance of clarifying the services they could (and could

505   not) offer, illustrating the development of contextual intelligence (Brown et al., 2005).

506   **Gender of consultants and clients.** The stories shared by participants offered insights into the

507   role of gender for sport psychology in Gaelic games. The sub-culture of Gaelic games was described

508   as male-dominated and subcultural norms, traditions, and ideals typical of hypermasculinity in sport

509   (Tibbert et al., 2015) were sometimes discussed. Female SPCs spoke about often being the only

510   female in male team environments, with some recollecting difficult encounters. One SPC recalled

511   one such situation with a coach early in her career:

512   Throughout that workshop, I was challenged by one of the coaching staff, not outwardly, so

513   that everybody else might get it, but *I* got it. And it was [pause], it was probably from that first

514   workshop, actually, that I realised that they probably didn't place as a high value on it as the

515   others had. (Experienced SPC 4)

516 Alongside offering an illustrative example of negative attitudes towards sport psychology raised in

517 Study 1, this story highlighted how female SPCs can encounter unique challenges (Champ et al.,

518 2019), which can be amplified in hypermasculine environments. Nevertheless, female SPCs also

519 shared more positive stories. Experienced SPC 1 contrasted a previous experience of feeling like a

520 "token female" with a more recent experience where some coaches were more open to sport

521 psychology:

522   In terms of my experience working with [an inter-county ladies football team], it has been

523   really, really positive and the majority of the coaches there, there's maybe one or two of the

524   male coaches [shakes head], they just don't want to know about it. They don't see it. Whereas

525   the manager and two of the other male coaches are really receptive to it.

526 Although one in two female players at the inter-county level report access to sport psychology

527 support (GPA, 2023) and most participants reported prior or current experiences of working with

528 female clients, few SPCs had been immersed within female team environments. One practitioner

529 spoke about their perception of the fragile position that a SPC could be in within female teams:

530   I've often wondered why do I not, or have I not, got more work with women's teams? I think

531   it's a no brainer, but I think the funds are an issue. So, they target the funds at different things.

532   And like psychology generally is last thing in and first thing out if something goes wrong.

533   That's the other story. It's the "add on" as opposed to core. (Expert SPC 3)

534 As conveyed by this practitioner, a lack of resources limited opportunities for working with female

535 players in any capacity or significantly curtailed the support that they could provide to female teams.

536 This exemplifies the impact that macro-level factors in Gaelic games, such as structural and resource

537 inequalities (GPA, 2023), can have on SPCs in this context.

538 ***Active Ingredients of Service Delivery in Gaelic Games***

539   **Forming working alliances with different people.** The quality of the working alliance

540   between a psychologist and client is fundamental to producing positive therapeutic outcomes (Duff

541   & Bedi, 2010) and the importance of developing working alliances characterised by respect,

542   credibility, and trust was widely conveyed. Our findings emphasise the importance of the SPC-

543   athlete relationship (e.g., Sharp et al., 2015; Tod et al., 2019), but also illustrated the importance of

544   developing trust and rapport with the manager/coaches and the wider multidisciplinary team (MDT)

545   to facilitate effective CDSP service delivery. Due to the time constraints, participants recognised

546   the need to make the most of the time available to them at training and competition to develop

547   interpersonal bonds and understanding of the culture, players, and coaches. As one participant said

548   when recalling the start of their work with an inter-county team, "I was just very hands on and

549   you're just straight in. You were at every training session, and you build that relationship and build

550   that trust with the players and with the coaching staff" (Novice SPC 2). When SPCs had the

551   opportunity (and were adequately resourced) to spend more time within the training environment,

552   this generally helped to strengthen working alliances. Building trust and rapport was a process that

553   took time, however, especially when contact time with players was limited. Illustrating the

554   challenge of building working alliances, one participant reflecting at the end of her second season

555   with an inter-county team said:

556   It's so hard to get to know 40 players when you're there once a week or whatever. So, to just

557   build that rapport, it's only now that I feel like I know a lot of the players and know what works

558   well with one player compared to another player. (Experienced SPC 1)

559   In light of the time constraints while working in Gaelic games, the SPCs spoke about making a

560   concerted effort to connect with players and to ensure the services they delivered were convenient

561   to build working alliances. Respect and trust from players and coaches led to more structured

562   sessions, and strong relationships were developed through observations, one-to-one meetings, brief-

563   contact interventions, and informal interactions before, during, and after training sessions. For

564   practitioners who operated as outsiders, developing a working alliance was more difficult.

565   **Building coach and athlete buy-in.** The role of buy in to sport psychology among players,

566   coaches, and, in some cases, administrators (e.g., games development manager) was integral. Coach

567   allegiance helped SPCs to gain entry to working with players. As one SPC operating in a male inter-

568   county team commented: "They [the coach] really bought into sports psychology. Maybe they

569   didn't understand all the bits, but they were brilliant gatekeepers and they let me do my work and

570   facilitated me to do my job in whatever shape I needed" (Expert SPC 3). Buy-in was not always

571   necessarily immediate within the Gaelic games context, however, and some SPCs shared stories in

572   which they made a specific effort to develop buy-in over time, reinforcing the importance of

573   consultancy duration for therapeutic outcomes (Wampold & Imel, 2015). When levels of buy in

574   among coaches were less than desired, making it clear as to how the sport psychology services being

575   delivered connected to current issues, and were thus sensitive to context, helped. One experienced

576   SPC spoke about the need to maximise buy in from coaches due to the time-limited, 'outsider' mode

577   of service delivery and recalled conversations with the coaching team that helped to develop this

578   buy in:

579   I didn't have full buy-in from the coaches at the start. Eventually I started having the

580   conversations with the coaches around, "What's going on at the moment? What issues are you

581   seeing?" Then you have those conversations [and I would say] "Oh, well, I'm actually going

582   to deal with that in the next workshop or going to deal with that today. Why don't you sit in?"

583   A few of them started sitting in and saw the benefits. We have conversations after [where I

584   ask], "how can you follow up with some of that in your next session?" So, they had the sports

585   psychology and then they go on to the pitch. So, you get those conversations, and you get more

586   buy in. (Experienced SPC 3)

587   In contrast to the above example, many stories indicated a lack of buy-in from coaches and athletes,

588   including in environments where the SPC was embedded and often attended training at least weekly.

589   Illustrative examples of a lack of buy in included late cancellations of planned sport psychology

590   activities or a lack of emphasis placed on utilising the SPC, resulting in service underutilisation.

591   Reflecting at the end of a first season with a female inter-county team, Expert SPC 2 commented:

592   I enjoyed working with the players, but again, I probably only had about a third of them that

593   really bought in to it. And there were some of the players, who would have been some of the

594   stronger players, didn't buy into it. They didn't really come and see me.

595   While buy in was often slow to develop initially, several recounted subtle, yet noticeable shifts

596   among players and coaches, especially when: players developed confidence in sport psychology

597   consulting via evidence of success; the SPC brought sport psychology onto the field; and the SPC

598   spent more time in the team environment (e.g., training camp). Numerous participants, however,

599   also recalled cases where they felt they were "ticking a box for SP" and obtained little buy in, and

600   subsequently had little impact.

601   **Practitioner, coach, and multi-disciplinary support team engagement.** Collaboration

602   between the SPC and coach was central to effective service delivery (e.g., Sharp et al., 2015) and

603   strong working alliances with coaches involved trust and agreement on goals, expectations, and

604   confidentiality. The nature and degree of coach engagement varied, but some stories involved SPCs

605   consulting with coaches during needs analysis, intervention planning (and refinement), delivery of

606   interventions (i.e., direct or indirect), and reflections, with these interactions helping to ensure that

607   sport psychology services delivered were tailored appropriately to the context. In some instances,

608   this also culminated in the SPC being able to contribute to the content of training sessions, with one

609   SPC explaining how they engaged with coaches to plan training for a male inter-county team:

610   When people were talking through practice, I would be saying to the coaches, "how can we use

611   that [drill or activity] to develop our qualities that we want to be?" So then [I was] just sort of

612   putting the pressure a bit more on the coaches to come up with solutions and you would have a

613   sort of back and forth. I could put some suggestions in, but equally, like they're the coaches, so

614   sometimes, they come up with really good suggestions. (Expert SPC 2)

615   Moreover, examples of working directly with coaches to improve their knowledge and create

616   consistency in messaging between the coaching team and SPC were shared. This was often achieved

617   through the coaches engaging with workshops: "I wanted the coaches to be there as well, so that

618   they could learn, as well as the players, and we were all on the same page, all using the same

619   language" (Novice SPC 3). Some SPCs working in team environments with a wider MDT also

620   discussed regular reflection and planning meetings, which helped to ensure that the sport

621   psychology support addressed a team's and players' current needs. Despite examples of more

622   positive engagement from coaches and MDTs, some recalled reluctance from coaches to engage:

623   What I found too is they're [coaches] really open to you coming in and they want to hear the

624   feedback. But when we're having the workshops with the teams, they won't stay. And then

625   you'd be like "do you not want to stay and maybe you could do a bit of work?" And they're

626   like, "no, no, no". (Experienced SPC 1)

627   This example reinforces findings in Study 1 concerning the lack of engagement from coaches.

628   Participants emphasised the importance of clarifying coach expectations early and gauging their

629   willingness to engage with the SPC to enable effective CDSP service delivery. Some experts were

630   less likely to work with teams when the coach was resistant to engaging with the SPC themselves.

631   Recognising the importance of assessing fit with a coach, one SPC commented:

632   One of the key questions I've started to ask is how open to feedback are they? And if a coach

633   or manager or whoever is not open to feedback, that's a massive red flag. They're a performer

634   in their own right. (Expert SPC 3)

635 This extract offers a further example of the shaping of practice to context and the use of contextual

636 intelligence, as the participant, who had over 15 years of experience, had identified and come to

637 recognise potential "red flags" that could impact upon the services they delivered.

638   **Active practitioner and player engagement.** The SPCs described a range of different

639 starting points for engaging with athletes, which were shaped by both contextual factors (e.g.,

640 whether a practitioner was going to be immersed or an outsider) and aspects of the practitioner's

641 contextual intelligence. Illustrating how context shapes service delivery, stories involving immersed

642 SPCs included more examples of player engagement. Due to their knowledge of the Gaelic games

643 context, a common goal for SPCs who begun with group sessions was to address (mis)perceptions

644 about sport psychology, overcome stigma tolerance, and clarify services they could offer.

645 Communicating this information in a manner considerate of the different attitudes that might exist

646 towards sport psychology (Brown et al., 2005) within the context was also considered important:

647   I always go in with that more sort of superficial, "developing mental skills" thing, and then, over

648   time, work more towards the sort of psychoeducation and personal development and those more

649   meaningful conversations. There was a supervisor of mine, when I was training, and who said,

650   "you want to make it seem like it's not psychology". So, I'm always aware of that and I think

651   it's good advice. So, I just go in as like, "I'm just here to try and help you enjoy what you're

652   doing and do it well", and then I had individual meetings with all of the players. (Expert SPC 2)

653 Further reinforcing the discipline-specific social scripts drawn upon, the above quote illustrates how

654 being able to deliver services using language, examples, and activities that were relevant to the

655 context (Pain & Harwood, 2004) and in a way that could dispel any negative connotations about

656   sport psychology (e.g., Mellalieu, 2017) were key to fostering engagement between the SPC and

657   players. Raising athletes' awareness of how support from the SPC could be integrated into their on-

658   field activities (e.g., activities on the pitch focused on communication, problem solving, handling

659   referee decisions) also bolstered athlete engagement, especially among players who were more

660   ambivalent. Although prior experience or knowledge of Gaelic games helped some SPCs to

661   implement sport psychology into drills and games in training, one SPC spoke of the concerted effort

662   needed to learn about how to play one sport having never watched it previously:

663   If you show a real willingness to learn a sport that you don't know and you don't try and pretend

664   you know more than you do, it's appreciated by people. So, I would always be ringing some of

665   the coaches after a game, going like, "right? How do you win a breaking ball? We didn't seem

666   to win many today. Talk me through that. What are you thinking when you're a player? How

667   do you kind of approach that situation and stuff?" Just so I'm at least trying to get an insight

668   into what it's like to play. (Expert SPC 2)

669   Alongside benefiting from having knowledge about the sport, participants discussed examples of

670   work with individual clients that were aided by athlete involvement in the change process.

671   Experienced SPC 3 recalled one such exchange with a male player:

672   He [client] said, "I read something that some of the [county] players, when they make a mistake,

673   they hit the reset button". So, I was like, "oh, can you talk me through that?" He said, "they

674   have a wristband. They put a dot on the wristband. Then when they make a mistake, they reset.

675   So, I go, "OK. Do you like that idea?" He said, "yeah. I thought it was really interesting". "So

676   why don't you try it?" He goes, "you know what? I will".

677   The above example resonates with a client-led approach and showcases how an SPC can cultivate

678   an environment that facilitates growth (Tod et al., 2019), while also leveraging the contextual

679   information shared by the client (i.e., example of another player in the game who uses a specific

680   technique) to sensitise the intervention to context. SPCs who met with individuals on a one-to-one

681   basis had an opportunity to develop relationships with individual athletes and tailor services, but

682   those who generally delivered team workshops less often tended to be more practitioner-led

683   (Keegan, 2016), offering the coach a "menu" of (usually PST) workshops they could choose from

684   and delivering these in group settings, thus reducing the level of player engagement.

685   **Conclusions**

686   Through two linked studies, we provide novel insights into applied sport psychology service

687   delivery in Gaelic games. In Study 1, we offered the first empirical evidence on practitioners

688   providing support for mental aspects of performance in Gaelic games (the *who*), the services they

689   deliver (the *what, how,* and *why*), and problems they encounter while delivering services (the

690   *context*). In Study 2, we illustrated how SPCs shaped their services to context and how the context

691   influenced services, so that the active ingredients for effective service delivery could be enabled (or

692   constrained). Further, we highlighted the importance of understanding how context and contextual

693   intelligence shaped the active ingredients of 'person-in-context' and 'team-in-context' service

694   delivery. Although sport psychology services will differ from context to context, findings

695   concerning the active ingredients of CDSP could be useful for practitioners working in other team-

696   sport environments, especially those in which access to players might be limited. Echoing previous

697   work in sport psychology (Mellalieu, 2017), our findings emphasise the importance of recognising

698   the role of context, learning about it, immersing oneself within it, working with it, and adapting

699   one's services to fit within it.

700   With the 36 participants who took part in Study 1 providing support on a sustained basis to

701   almost 100 teams, this suggests reasonable interest in sport psychology in Gaelic games.

702   Nevertheless, some notable issues included: the large variations in the participants' educational

703   backgrounds, accreditation status, and titles used; evidence of the delivery of services by individuals

704   who were not accredited nor pursuing accreditation; low levels of engagement in supervision; and

705   misunderstandings in Gaelic games about the role and parameters of sport psychology. Arguably,

706   many of these issues could be linked to the lack of all-island regulation of sport psychology in

707   Ireland. Although these findings could have implications for sport psychology in Gaelic games and

708   Ireland, they also offer insight into the multiplicity of ways in which professional standards and

709   regulations (or lack thereof) can impact upon the delivery of sport psychology services that are

710   relevant across jurisdictions. Professional credentialing aims to provide quality assurance for a

711   profession and give clients confidence that a practitioner has achieved a minimal level of theoretical

712   and practical competence and practices in line with ethical standards (Keegan & Cotterill, 2020).

713   With the growing focus on accreditation systems globally (Schinke et al., 2018) and concerns raised

714   with the lack of regulation of sport psychology in this study, our findings call for action at

715   organizational and regulatory levels to protect and develop the profession both in Ireland and in

716   other geographical contexts where further development of professional standards is required,

717   something that is not uncommon in sport psychology. Moreover, with misunderstandings about

718   sport psychology reported in both studies, we suggest that enhancing the sport psychology literacy

719   of coaches, players, support personnel, administrators, and the media is key to increase

720   understanding.

721   Findings from Study 2 reinforce the importance of developing contextual intelligence and

722   delivering CDSP services (Schinke & Stambulova, 2017) and provide the basis for a contextual

723   map (Brown et al., 2005) that can inform the delivery of CDSP services in Gaelic games and in

724   other comparable team-sport contexts. In line with the proposed contents of a contextual map

725   (Brown et al., 2005), the findings: (a) detail key contextual factors at the micro-level (e.g.,

726   challenges of organising one-to-one meetings with players), meso-level (e.g., working as part of a

727   MDT), and macro-levels (e.g., amateur status of players, lack of coach education on SP) that

728   influence services delivered; (b) present insights into resources for (e.g., delivering services as part

729   of an MDT, working with and through coaches) and obstacles to (e.g., lack of buy in from players

730   and coaches) service delivery; and (c) offers a framework of active ingredients (i.e., developing a

731   working alliance, buy in, and engagement with various people) that can be compared to other sports.

732   Furthermore, participants in the current study also offered learnings from, and solutions to, the

733   challenges they encountered, which could also be useful for practitioners in other contexts.

734   Based on our findings and the contextual map of active ingredients that might facilitate

735   effective CDSP service delivery, we suggest several considerations to inform contextually-

736   intelligent practice. Our findings underscore the importance of a SPC's ability to clarify the services

737   they provide and communicate this in a language suited to the context (Brown et al., 2005). When

738   gaining entry, an SPC should be aware of attitudes towards sport psychology in a particular context.

739   Moreover, SPCs should identify the key means of influence (Brown et al., 2005) and nurture strong

740   relationships with them. The current findings echo previous research in other sport contexts (Keegan

741   et al., 2022) by showing the importance of integrating the SPC into the MDT. Thus, SPCs should

742   focus on developing the working alliance with, and buy in from, coaches and the MDT. As enquiries

743   for sport psychology services are likely to range widely, a contextually-intelligent SPC should

744   consider constraints in place (e.g., temporal, spatial, financial, personnel) and the contextual maps

745   available to them, to optimise service effectiveness. Our findings provide evidence to support

746   previous claims that immersion within a sport environment is valuable for service effectiveness

747   (Poczwardowski et al., 2020), but also indicate that simply being present does not inevitably lead

748   to good working alliances, allegiance, engagement, and, ultimately, effective CDSP services.

749   Therefore, careful consideration is needed of the time and effort required to immerse oneself within,

750   and work with, a team, while acknowledging that this process is also influenced by contextual

751   factors.

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