

Study on Coach Support, Social Support, Team Climate, and Stress among Male and Female Student-Athletes

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Abstract: *Student-athletes experience a distinctive combination of academic, athletic, interpersonal, and performance-related demands that can contribute to psychological stress. Within this context, coach support, social support, and team climate may function as important psychosocial resources that influence how athletes perceive and manage stressful experiences. The present research paper examines the role of coach support, broader social support, and team climate in relation to stress among male and female student-athletes, with particular attention to possible gender-related differences. The study is grounded in the view that stress among student-athletes is not exclusively an individual phenomenon but is also shaped by interpersonal and organizational environments. Previous research has demonstrated that coaches' social support can moderate the relationship between life stress and athlete burnout, while broader social support has been associated with better psychological functioning and lower burnout.*

Keywords: Coach Support, Social Support, Team Climate, Stress, Student-Athletes, Gender Differences, Sport Psychology

I. INTRODUCTION

Participation in competitive sport provides young people with opportunities for physical development, achievement, social interaction, discipline, leadership, and psychological growth. At the same time, student-athletes are required to manage the demands of academic study and athletic participation simultaneously. Training schedules, competitions, performance expectations, injuries, selection pressures, examinations, time management, travel, interpersonal relationships, and expectations from coaches and teammates can create multiple sources of stress. Research on student-athletes has consequently emphasized that sporting stress should be considered alongside the broader academic and social environment in which athletes operate. For example, research involving student-athletes has identified coaches' social support as an important factor in the relationship between life stress and burnout.

Coach support represents one of the most immediate forms of psychosocial support available to athletes. Coaches influence training environments, communication patterns, performance expectations, feedback, decision-making, motivation, and interpersonal relationships.

A supportive coach may provide emotional encouragement, technical guidance, constructive feedback, information, and tangible assistance. Kristiansen and Roberts (2010), in their study of young elite athletes, found that athletes relied on different forms of social support when coping with competitive and organizational stress and emphasized the importance of a positive coach-athlete relationship. Similarly, Rhind and Jowett (2010) identified support, openness, positivity, advice, conflict management, and social networks as important relationship-maintenance strategies within coach-athlete relationships.

Social support extends beyond the coach and can include teammates, friends, family members, teachers, sport personnel, and other significant individuals. The availability and perceived quality of such support may affect how athletes respond to stressful situations. However, social support should not automatically be assumed to buffer every form of stress.

A longitudinal study of 465 collegiate athletes found that social support and negative social interactions contributed to burnout and well-being across a competitive season, although social support did not significantly moderate the stress–burnout relationship in that particular analysis. This finding demonstrates why the relationship between stress and social support requires empirical examination rather than simple assumptions.

The team climate constitutes another important aspect of the athletic environment. Team climate refers broadly to athletes' shared perceptions of interpersonal relationships, communication, cooperation, inclusion, trust, cohesion, leadership, and the general emotional atmosphere of the team.

A positive team climate may provide athletes with a sense of belonging and security, whereas conflict, poor communication, excessive interpersonal tension, or lack of support may increase psychological strain. Research on social constructs and athlete burnout has found that positive social experiences such as social support and relatedness tend to be negatively associated with burnout, while negative social interactions tend to be positively associated with burnout.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

1. Coach Support and Athlete Stress

Coach support encompasses emotional, informational, esteem, motivational, and tangible forms of assistance provided by coaches. Coaches occupy an influential position because they regulate many aspects of athletes' daily sporting experiences. Supportive communication can help athletes understand expectations, interpret setbacks, solve performance problems, and maintain confidence.

Kristiansen and Roberts (2010) reported that adolescent elite athletes relied on social support when dealing with competitive and organizational stress and emphasized the importance of a good coach–athlete relationship. Lu (2016) examined 218 student-athletes and found that coaches' social support interacted with athlete resilience in moderating the stress–burnout relationship. Informational and tangible support from coaches were particularly relevant in the reported moderation effects.

Perry (2016) examined 158 coach–athlete dyads and highlighted that stress coping can be an interpersonal process rather than solely an individual process. Their findings support the importance of relationship quality and dyadic coping in understanding stress within sport.

2. Social Support and Athlete Stress

Social support can originate from family, friends, teammates, coaches, teachers, and other individuals. It can provide emotional reassurance, advice, practical assistance, feedback, and a sense of belonging. These resources may be particularly valuable when athletes face academic pressure, injury, competition, selection uncertainty, or performance difficulties.

Arnold (2018) examined 122 talented athletes and found that social support moderated relationships involving organizational stressors and subjective performance, although some of the interactions represented reverse-buffering effects. This demonstrates that the effectiveness of support may depend on the type and intensity of stressor and the form of support received.

Hartley and Coffee (2019) found that higher stress was associated with greater burnout across burnout dimensions, while perceived availability of certain forms of social support was associated with lower burnout. Emotional support also showed a stress-buffering effect for sport devaluation in their analysis.

3. Team Climate and Athlete Psychological Health

Team climate reflects the interpersonal environment experienced within a sports team. Important components include trust, communication, cooperation, acceptance, cohesion, respect, shared goals, and perceived fairness. A supportive team climate can potentially reduce feelings of isolation and help athletes cope with setbacks.

Pacewicz (2019) conducted a meta-analytic review of 20 studies and found low-to-moderate inverse relationships between social support/relatedness and athlete burnout, while negative social interactions were positively associated with burnout. These findings provide support for examining the social environment of sport rather than focusing exclusively on individual characteristics.

4. Coach–Athlete Relationship and Burnout

The quality of the coach–athlete relationship can influence athletes' psychological experiences. Communication, trust, mutual respect, and appropriate coaching behavior may facilitate positive experiences, whereas controlling behavior, poor communication, and relationship difficulties may contribute to psychological strain.

In a study of 347 Korean collegiate athletes, Kim (2020) reported that autonomy-supportive coaching was positively related to communication and the coach–athlete relationship, while controlling coaching was positively associated with burnout. Communication and coach–athlete relationship quality were negatively associated with burnout.

5. Gender and Stress Among Student-Athletes

Gender differences require careful empirical examination because male and female athletes may encounter different social expectations and may perceive or communicate stress differently. Parnabas (2014), studying 152 Malaysian student-athletes, included 80 males and 72 females and examined stress symptoms across different competitive levels.

Research on coach support has also considered gender differences. A study published online in 2020 involving 322 university student-athletes examined gender differences in perceived coach social support, optimism/pessimism, and psychological well-being. Thus, gender should be treated as an important comparative variable while avoiding assumptions that one group necessarily experiences greater or lesser stress without empirical evidence.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The present study proposes that stress among student-athletes is influenced by three major psychosocial resources:

Coach Support → Stress

Social Support → Stress

Team Climate → Stress

Gender is considered a comparative variable:

Male Student-Athletes ↔ Female Student-Athletes

The framework assumes that positive support and a constructive team environment may be associated with lower perceived stress. However, the actual strength and statistical significance of these relationships should be determined through empirical analysis.

Table 1. Conceptual Variables of the Study

Variable	Major Dimensions	Expected Relationship with Stress
Coach Support	Emotional, informational, esteem, tangible support	Negative association
Social Support	Family, friends, teammates, significant others	Negative association
Team Climate	Communication, trust, cooperation, cohesion, inclusion	Negative association
Stress	Academic, athletic, interpersonal and performance-related stress	Dependent variable
Gender	Male and female student-athletes	Comparative variable

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the level of coach support among male and female student-athletes.
- To examine the level of social support perceived by male and female student-athletes.
- To assess the perceived team climate among student-athletes.
- To determine the level of stress experienced by male and female student-athletes.
- To examine the relationship between coach support and stress.
- To examine the relationship between social support and stress.
- To examine the relationship between team climate and stress.
- To compare male and female student-athletes on coach support, social support, team climate, and stress.
- To determine the combined contribution of coach support, social support, and team climate to perceived stress.

HYPOTHESES

- H₁:** Coach support will be significantly related to perceived stress among student-athletes.
- H₂:** Social support will be significantly related to perceived stress among student-athletes.
- H₃:** Team climate will be significantly related to perceived stress among student-athletes.
- H₄:** Significant differences will exist between male and female student-athletes in selected psychosocial variables and perceived stress.
- H₅:** Coach support, social support, and team climate will collectively explain a significant proportion of variance in perceived stress.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

A quantitative cross-sectional comparative research design is appropriate for the proposed investigation. The design permits the researcher to measure coach support, social support, team climate, and stress at a particular point in time and compare the responses of male and female student-athletes.

2. Participants

The study may include male and female student-athletes enrolled in colleges or universities and actively participating in organized sports. A balanced sample of approximately 200 student-athletes, comprising 100 males and 100 females, may be selected if this sample size is consistent with the researcher's actual field data.

3. Sampling Technique

A stratified sampling procedure may be used to ensure representation of male and female student-athletes. Within each gender stratum, participants may be selected using random or purposive procedures depending on institutional access and eligibility requirements.

4. Inclusion Criteria

Participants should:
be currently enrolled as students;
actively participate in organized competitive sport;
have regular interaction with a coach;
belong to a recognized college/university sports program; and
voluntarily agree to participate.

5. Measures

The questionnaire may contain five sections:
Demographic information.
Coach support.
Social support.
Team climate.

Perceived stress.

Established and psychometrically tested instruments should be selected according to the target population. Coach-support measures should capture emotional, informational, esteem, and tangible support, while social-support measures should distinguish relevant sources of support. Team-climate measurement should address communication, cooperation, cohesion, trust, and interpersonal environment.

6. Data Collection Procedure

After obtaining institutional permission and informed consent, questionnaires may be administered individually or in small groups. Participants should be informed that participation is voluntary and that responses will be used only for academic research. No personally identifying information should be included in the analytical dataset.

7. Statistical Analysis

The following statistical techniques are appropriate:

Frequency and percentage

Mean and standard deviation

Independent-samples *t*-test

Pearson correlation

Multiple regression analysis

Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha

The statistical significance level may be set at $p < .05$.

PROPOSED DATA ANALYSIS TABLES

Because no original participant dataset was supplied with the question, the following tables are research-analysis templates, not fabricated findings.

Table 2. Demographic Distribution of Student-Athletes

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	100	50.0
Female	100	50.0
Total	200	100.0

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Major Study Variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Coach Support	200	—	—
Social Support	200	—	—

Team Climate	200	—	—
Perceived Stress	200	—	—

DISCUSSION

The central premise of this study is that the psychological experience of student-athletes is embedded within an interpersonal and organizational environment. Athletes do not experience competitive stress in isolation. Their interpretation of performance demands may be influenced by coaches, teammates, family members, friends, and the broader team environment.

Coach support is particularly important because coaches have direct influence over training practices, performance feedback, communication, selection, role assignment, and expectations. Research has demonstrated that coaches' social support can interact with athletes' resilience in the stress–burnout relationship. This suggests that support may be particularly valuable when athletes face elevated demands.

The coach–athlete relationship also provides an important mechanism through which coach support may influence athlete well-being. Perry (2016) showed that coping with stress may involve interpersonal processes between athletes and coaches. Therefore, effective stress management in sport should not necessarily be viewed solely as an individual responsibility.

Social support represents a broader protective resource. Athletes may obtain different types of support from different people. Emotional support may provide reassurance, informational support may help solve performance problems, and tangible support may provide practical assistance. The evidence suggests, however, that the relationship between support and stress-related outcomes is complex. Arnold (2018) reported that support moderated organizational stressor–performance relationships but also identified reverse-buffering patterns. Thus, merely increasing the quantity of support may not be sufficient; the quality, timing, source, and appropriateness of support may matter.

Team climate provides an additional layer of the psychosocial environment. Athletes who perceive their team as cooperative, respectful, communicative, and cohesive may have greater access to interpersonal resources. Conversely, conflict, negative interactions, exclusion, and communication problems can potentially increase psychological burden. The meta-analysis by Pacewicz (2019) supports the relevance of the social environment by showing associations between social constructs and athlete burnout.

II. CONCLUSION

The study of coach support, social support, team climate, and stress provides an integrated approach to understanding the psychological experiences of male and female student-athletes. Student-athletes must simultaneously manage academic and sporting responsibilities, making interpersonal and organizational resources particularly important. Evidence from 2010–2020 indicates that supportive coaching, positive social relationships, and constructive sporting environments are relevant to athlete well-being, stress, and burnout, although their effects are not uniform across all circumstances.

Coach support may assist athletes through emotional, informational, esteem, and tangible resources. Social support can provide additional coping resources, while a positive team climate may strengthen belonging, communication, and cooperation. The study's gender comparison can provide further insight into whether these psychosocial variables operate similarly among male and female student-athletes. Nevertheless, conclusions regarding gender differences should be based on actual statistical findings rather than assumptions.

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