Developing mental health literacy interventions in sport settings: The need for feasibility studies

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Abstract

Introduction: Mental health literacy interventions aim to 1) improve knowledge of mental health symptoms and support systems, 2) address stigmatizing attitudes toward mental health symptoms, and 3) improve intentions to seek mental health support. Within sport settings, across athletes, coaches, and officials, evidence has shown that such interventions can improve the recognition of mental health symptoms, increase mental health professional referral knowledge, decrease stigma, and increase confidence and intentions to seek mental health professional support. Before the construction and implementation of large scale interventions, feasibility studies help answer an important question: will the intervention work? This study examined the feasibility and acceptability of a mental health literacy intervention amongst semi-elite women rugby players in the UK. Materials and methods: A modified A-B-A single case experimental

research design examined a four session intervention with seven participants. The study focused on: 1) recruitment capability; 2) data collection methods; 3) intervention acceptability; 4) resource management; and 5) mental health literacy outcomes. Results: The study demonstrated that there is a need for mental health literacy interventions within semi-elite womens rugby and that recruitment is possible. Recruitment strategies combined with demographic data collection concerning protected characteristics helped demonstrate that a diverse population accessed the intervention. Participants found the intervention acceptable and helpful with respect to knowledge, stigma, and intentions to seek support. Discussion: Feasibility studies focus on study and intervention process. These carefully executed studies help construct larger scale interventions that are inclusive and respectful of the target population, along with appropriate tools of evaluation.