

Experiences of REDs are Complex and Multifaceted, with Expectations and Perceptions Shaped by Individual Perspectives

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Introduction

Since the introduction of relative energy deficiency in sport (REDs) in 2014,¹ research has primarily focused on athletes' experiences of REDs symptomology and consequences. This inhibits gaining a holistic understanding of REDs beyond the athlete experience, as coaching and support staff are tasked with an overarching goal of optimising athlete health and performance.² This optimisation is delivered to athletes through coaching practices and advice, which can be intentionally preventative or unintentionally contributory to the development of REDs.³ However, despite the variance and frequency of coach-athlete engagement,⁴ research combining athletes with coaching and support staff investigating their respective perspectives of REDs is limited.

Aim

To assess the alignment between athletes' expectations of coaching and support staff's role within REDs, and staff members' perceptions of athletes' REDs experience.

Methods

- Mixed-methods, cross-sectional design.
- Utilising two inter-related questionnaires.
- Chi-Square Test of Independence (χ^2) to examine the relationship between the role of being an athlete and coaching or support staff, and the awareness of REDs.
- Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

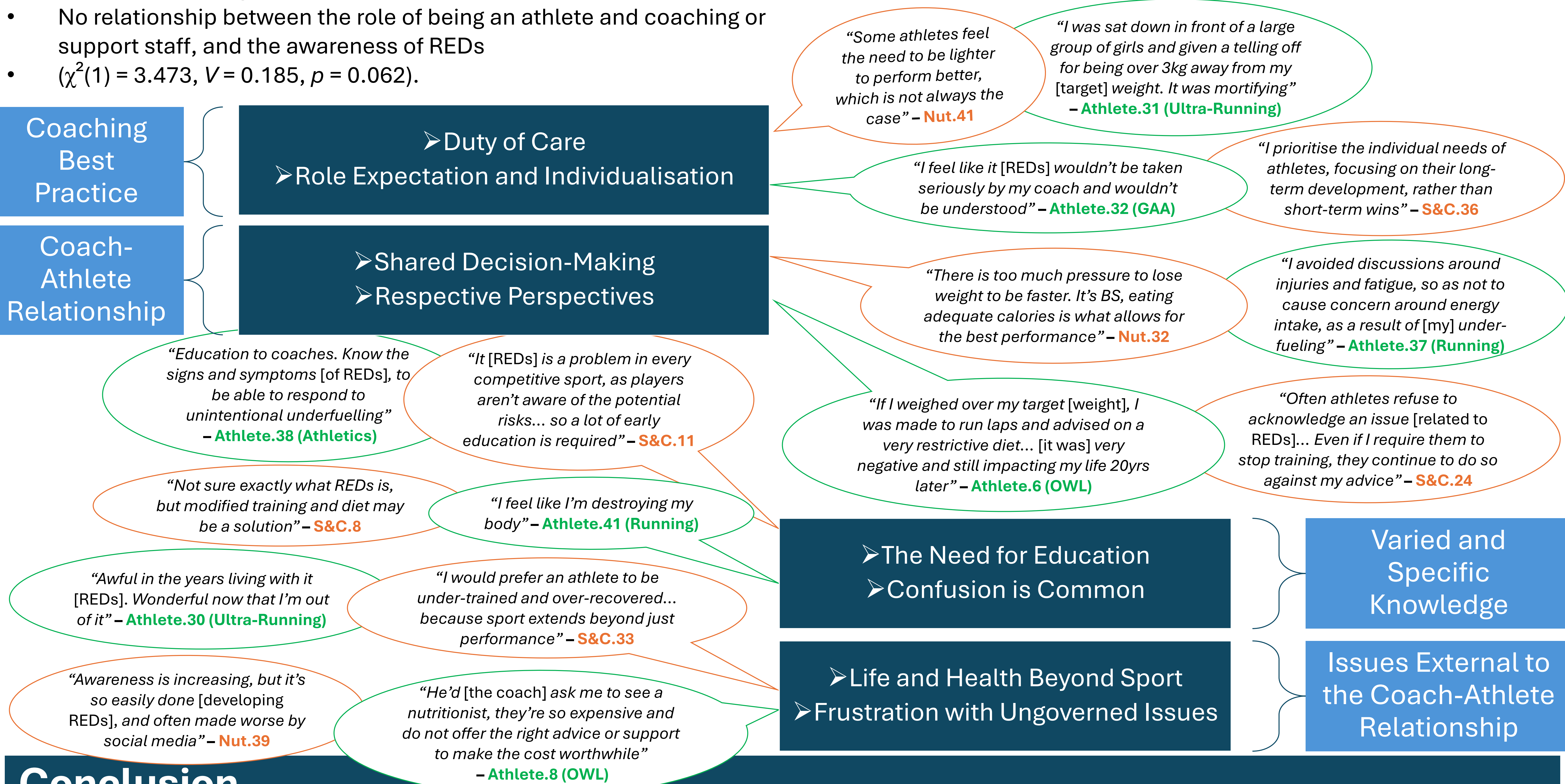
Results

Quantitative

- 56 athletes ($n = 41$ [73%] female; 15 [27%] male).
- 45 coaching and support staff ($n = 14$ [31%] female; 31 [69%] male).
- 31 (55%) athletes aware of REDs.
- 33 (73%) coaching and support staff aware of REDs.
- No relationship between the role of being an athlete and coaching or support staff, and the awareness of REDs
- ($\chi^2(1) = 3.473$, $V = 0.185$, $p = 0.062$).

Qualitative

- An inductive approach was adopted, utilising latent coding to interpret athlete, coaching and support staff responses
 - 4 Themes identified
 - 8 Sub-Themes identified



Conclusion

Despite a similar awareness of REDs between participants, this failed to translate to institutional protocols or technical proficiency; resulting in an awareness-action gap. Similarities and disparities were also present between athletes' expectations of staff members in relation to REDs, and of coaching and support staff's perception of athletes' experiences of REDs:

- Athletes desired to receive, and coaching and support staff to facilitate; individualized REDs care.
- Athletes with REDs, experienced negative coaching practices, and held expectations of receiving a lack of support.
- Coaching and support staff considered their potential to positively influence athletes' REDs experience as limited.
- Education was indicated as being a key factor in mitigating athletes' risk of; and improving coaching and support staffs' practice in relation to REDs.

References

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To read the full paper: **"Roles and Expectations Related to Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (REDs) – A Survey Assessing the Perceptions of REDs Between Athletes, Coaches, and Support Staff"**
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