



## **Introduction to the Special Issue: Evidence-Based Sport Social Work Practice**

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Scholars and practitioners, alike, have increasingly begun to recognize sport social work as a subspecialty of social work practice (e.g., Kratz & Rosado, 2022). Despite the recent and continued growth of sport social work, barriers to professionalizing the subspecialty remain (Newman et al., 2022). Indeed, research exploring interprofessional healthcare teams has routinely underscored misconceptions of social work practice, particularly within the context of sport (McHenry et al., 2021). Broman (1995) offers three primary components that define a profession that can act as an organizing framework for the professionalization of sport social work: (a) specific standards of training and education, (b) an ethical code, and (c) a theoretical foundational and applied knowledge base.

To meet the first criterion, there has been scholarship and advocacy for increased specialized educational opportunities for sport social work, including practicum placements in sport-specific settings (e.g., Clark et al., 2022; Magier et al., 2023). As such, the Alliance of Social Workers in Sports (ASWIS) created professional and educational guidelines for undergraduate and graduate social work programs when developing and supervising sport-specific practicum placements (Beasley et al., 2023). Bates and Kratz (2022) also reported the growth in specific sport social work academic learning pathways, including specialized certificates, concentrations, and courses. Scholarship has also clearly demonstrated the alignment between the National Association of Social Workers (2021) Code of Ethics and sport social work practice (Beasley et al., 2022; Moore et al., 2018), thereby meeting the second criterion—sharing of an ethical code—of professionalization.

The development of a clear theoretical foundation and applied knowledgebase of sport social work, however, has been more difficult. Sport social work scholars have begun to define

common roles fulfilled by sport social workers (Newman et al., 2022). For instance, sport social workers have a long history of using sport and recreation to promote youth and community development (e.g., Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2021). Becoming more commonplace for sport social workers is the provision of case management and licensed mental health services with elite-level athletes in collegiate athletics and professional sports (e.g., Beasley et al., 2021). Sport social workers are also known to utilize sport as a social platform to advocate for social justice and equity (e.g., Tarr et al., 2023). Much like the social work profession itself, sport social workers operate within sport settings and systems in a diversity of ways. Therefore, for sport social work to truly emerge as a unique subspeciality within the social work profession, research establishing evidence-based practices is compulsory.

The goal of this special issue is to begin filling that gap by collating evidence-based sport social work practices. Like sport social work, the articles in this special issue highlight a diversity of ways that social work and sport intersect to become sport social work. The seven articles in this issue are organized to underscore the distinct ways in which sport social work has begun to emerge.

### **Interventions**

The first three articles explore various approaches to sport social work interventions. In their article, *The Ecological Map of Adolescent Athletes: Examining Integrated Care Approaches*, Werner explores the lived experiences of adolescent athletes living with a physical illness. Findings, interpreted through the lens of ecological systems theory, provide empirical support for an integrated care approach when working with adolescent athletes, especially considering the intersection of physical and mental health. Bates, Nothnagle, and Mokadam's article, *Resilience Training for High School Student-Athletes: A Pilot of the Life and Leadership Through Sport Series*, examines the development, implementation, and evaluation of a six-session resilience training—the Life and Leadership Through Sport Series—for high school athletes and coaches, comparing two different methods of program delivery. Analysis of post-intervention evaluations support the possible effectiveness of this resilience training program for high school athletes and coaches but suggest different delivery methods may be more effective for coaches versus athletes. Finally, Roberts, Darroch, and Hayhurst, using a feminist participatory action research (FPAR) design, explore the use of trauma-informed physical activity for women who have experienced violence and the barriers that the COVID-19 pandemic created in providing such care. By interviewing service-providers in Canada, the authors explore the challenges to providing physical activity interventions in virtual settings and the ways in which physical activity interventions in social service organizations have become framed as a “nonessential” in the time of the pandemic. They conclude with a call for practitioners to advocate for the continued inclusion of trauma-informed physical activity in conjunction with traditional social services. Together, these set of articles add to the sport social work literature by providing implications for evidenced-based sport social work interventions.

### **Mental Health and Measurement Tools**

This special issue also features two articles that expand upon the use of mental health measurement tools, particularly when providing mental and behavioral health services in

collegiate athletics. In the first article, Cohen-Young conducted *A Systematic Literature Review of Mental Health Assessment Measures for College Athletes: Analyzing the Rigor of Empirical Validation and Implications for Practice*. Findings from the study indicate there are currently very few empirically supported assessment tools available to screen for mental health diagnoses among college athletes. Appropriately, Gavrilova<sup>1</sup>, Donohue, Barchard, and Allen conducted a study *Examining the Factor Structure of a Widely Used Measure of Psychiatric Symptoms in Collegiate Athletes*. Results from the Confirmatory Factor Analysis provide support for the use of the Symptom Checklist 90 – Revised (SCL-90-R) with college athletes to determine symptom severity of mental health diagnoses. Ultimately, to adequately support the holistic, biopsychosocial health of college athletes, there remains a need to develop novel, athlete-specific measurement tools.

### **Teaching and Pedagogy**

The final section of this special issue features unique insights into educational programs and curricula, which are gleaned from advancements in education and training for sport psychology professionals. First, Gorczynski, Miller Aron, Oftadeh-Moghadam, and Olusoga provide a descriptive example of *Collaborative and Interdisciplinary Teaching in Sport and Exercise: Lessons from the Development and Delivery of an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Workshop*. Specifically, the authors highlight key features of the Sport and Exercise Psychology Accreditation Route (SEPAR) training program offered through the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences. The final article from this special issue—*Engaging Youth with the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility Framework: Sport Psychology Graduate Students' Experience in a Service-Learning Course* by Wyatt, Altierie Jr., Hayden, Whitley, Diehl, and Tichnor-Wagner—explored a service-learning course designed for sport psychology students. Findings from their study highlight the importance of self-reflection and supervision during service-learning for graduate student learners. Indeed, for aspiring sport social workers, interprofessional learning opportunities may provide unique insights and important lessons for competently serving the needs of college athletes.

### **A Final Thought**

As sport social work continues to become professionalized as a subspecialty within the social work profession, so must the research that seeks to capture critical insights and construct novel understandings. To advance the foundational and applied knowledge base of sport social work, future research must continue to investigate the diversity of ways sport social workers are currently serving the needs of people and communities in sport. For instance, using an ecological systems perspective, research can begin to explore the bidirectional impact of sport participation, on both the individual and broader community. Research is also needed to examine the effectiveness of interprofessional healthcare team models in sport organizations and the ability to provide equitable and accessible behavioral and mental healthcare services in sport. There are undoubtedly numerous other future research opportunities to continue to build an applied knowledge base of sport social work, and we hope the articles included in this special issue inspire some of this work. Ultimately, the goal of this special issue—*Evidence-Based Sport Social Work Practices*—is to build upon the foundation laid by sport social work trailblazers, scholars and practitioners, alike, and help to further establish sport social work as a unique area of social work practice. As such, we want to express our sincerest gratitude to the authors for

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