

Pressures to perform: An Interview study of Australian high performance school-age athletes' perceptions of balancing their school and sporting lives.

Maureen O'Neill^a, Bill Allen^a, Angela M. Calder^a

^aFaculty of Science, Health, Education and Engineering, University of the Sunshine Coast,
Maroochydore DC, Queensland 4558, Australia

Abstract

High performance school-age athletes struggle to balance the demands of their sporting and educational roles. They are like “hyphenated” individuals striving to deal with more than one life. This investigation examines the views of talented athletes who are full-time school students to elicit their perspectives of how they deal with the pressures to perform in these two different arenas. Previous published research on this topic has not included athletes’ views or “given voice” to school-age high performance athletes’ perceptions of how they balance two full-time lives. This study incorporated a cross-sectional design using qualitative techniques in an interpretivist paradigm. Data collection was through interviews using Livescribe™ pen. NVivo 9.2™ was used to analyse interviews from nine current and 10 former school-age high performance athletes (n=19) across a range of sports. Findings were categorised into five themes: physical, social, educational, psychological and economic issues. In particular participants in this study identified specific problems they experienced with physical and social issues of: tiredness, nutritional awareness, procrastination, and personal sacrifices. All participants indicated they wanted to pursue both their education and sport, reinforcing the *Element* theoretical construct that doing both connects their sense of identity, purpose and well-being. Implications for policy and practice in schools and in sports are discussed with a view to identifying the characteristics that define an ‘athlete friendly school’. Research findings from this study also provide suggestions about how these young athletes, their parents, and teachers can optimise the dual-demands and pressures on these athletes’ lives.

Keywords

School-age athlete, high performance sport, perceptions, pressures, dual life, Australian

Introduction

There were 17 school-age athletes in the Australian London Olympic team (Australian Olympic Committee, 2012). This is the highest number of school-age athletes included in an Australian Olympic team since the start of the modern Olympics in 1896 (Chatziefstathiou, 2007). The increasing number of such children in Australian high performance sport is a reflection of a national trend. For example, the Australian Sport Commission (ASC) reported that a total of 700 Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) scholarships were awarded to high performance athletes in 26 sports in 2012 (ASC, 2012). Four hundred and seventy three of these scholarships were awarded to school-age athletes in that year compared to only 142 being awarded to school-age athletes in 2005 (ASC, 2012; Eggins, 2006). All of these athletes were under 18 years of age and expected to fulfil their requirements as school students and as high performance athletes (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). The term *high performance school-age athlete* is used to define these people. This term reflects the theoretical construct of the “hyphenated individual” (Fine & Sirin, 2007) being those individuals who have two to three lives around their ‘hyphen’. This investigation had the same aim as the Fine and Sirin study which was to give voice to, and develop understandings of, these ‘hyphenated’ young people.

Previous literature on this topic has identified a number of potential and anticipated problems, primarily with regard to the challenges of managing two full-time roles and the potential impact this situation may have on the athlete (Radtke & Coalter, 2007). The first of these problems was time availability and management (Penney & Hay, 2008). Meeting and handling the demands of training and performing, and those of the school curriculum is a function of time management (Christensen & Sørensen; 2009). Other challenges facing these athletes include the need for them to develop exceptional social cognitive and organisational skills at a young age to accommodate both their academic and sporting demands (Burden, Tremayne, & Marsh 2004; Cheng, Marsh, Dowson & Martin, 2006; Finney, 2001; Gurkan, 2009; Helsen, Starkes, & Van Winckel, 1998; McKenzie, Hodge, & Caranachan, 2003; Palmer, 2010; Penney & Hay, 2008; Radtke & Coalter, 2007; Walshaw, 2010). Anderson and Butzin (1974) have suggested that fatigue resulting from training and competition demands may temper athlete motivation to engage in a high level of academic undertaking. Another problem experienced for many was travel (Spillane, 2009). This is also a considerable financial and time constraint for families, especially those from rural and remote areas when accessing training and sporting venues (Fabiansson & Healey, 2007;

Spillane, 2009). Social factors can also impact on these athletes. Kristiansen and Roberts (2010) conducted a study on the Norwegian Olympic Youth Team ($N=29$, aged 14-17, sport: handball, track and field, swimming, and judo). They investigated how participants experienced competitive and organizational stress during the European Youth Olympic Festival in July 2007 and how these athletes coped with stressors. The findings from this study revealed the need for “social support for adolescent athletes, and underlined the importance of a good coach–athlete relationship in order to perform well and enjoy the competitive experience” (p. 694).

Financial pressures faced by parents and felt by high performance school-age athletes also relate to the costs associated with registration fees, equipment, competing and training (Berger, O'Reilly, Parent, Séguin, & Hernandez; 2008; Tikly & Barrett, 2011). Several researchers have linked these financial pressures to the secondary issue of being ‘time-poor’ (Crawford 2009, Olds, Dollman, Ridley, Boshoff, Hartsborne, & Kennaugh 2004). These authors state that being time poor is a greater problem for parents with low incomes because they have to work more hours to raise necessary funds. This then results in less time to support their children in being available to drop off, pick up and attend all the training and competitions expected for their child. Mixing with adult athletes has also been identified as a problem for athletes still at school (Coleman, 2009). High performance school-age athletes often train with adult squad members, and perhaps of greater concern, to mix with them in adult social environments (Mullis, Byno, Shriner, & Mullis, 2009). This has sometimes resulted in exposure to inappropriate use of alcohol and drugs, occurrences of sexual misbehaviour and even sexual abuse (Coleman, 2009). The unfortunate outcomes of such exposure include the younger athletes’ inability to cope with training and school commitments, and with what would be regarded as normal social behaviour for someone of their age (Weiss, 2002; Wilson, Stavros, & Westberg, 2008). Similarly, there have been reports of high performance athletes being bullied at school. Atkinhead (2009) revealed how Tom Daley an artistic diver who won gold at the European championships, was bullied on his return to school. The extent of this bullying was so stressful for Tom that he moved to another school.

Despite studies investigating the issue of balancing school and sporting commitments, the athletes’ views of how they combine their dual endeavours are not evident in existing research publications. Hence the research question underpinning this study revolved around how these

high performance school-age athletes cope with the full-time demands of high performance sport, schoolwork, and the other demands of adolescent development. In particular, the aim of this study was to examine school-age athletes' personal views about their dual lives. It was hypothesised that their perspectives would lead to more comprehensive indications of how best to support such athletes at school, at home and within their sporting roles. The published empirical research around the topic has taken a problem-centred approach but the uniqueness of this study was to listen to what the athletes themselves said about their lives.

Methods

1. Participants

Nineteen participants were selected for in-depth interviews in this study. Of these, nine were current (C) and 10 were former (F) high performance school-age athletes. The nine current athletes were still at school and aged between 15 and 17 years (participants C1 to C9). The 10 Former athletes were those that had left school, i.e. over 18 (participants F1 to F10). The nine current athletes (C1 to C9) still at school competed in a variety of high level sports including, surfing, water polo, rugby league, swimming, ocean ski paddling, surf lifesaving, gymnastics, dance and kayaking (Table 1). Six of these athletes were from individual sports and three were from team sports. One unexpected participant in this group was a 17 year-old home-schooled athlete who provided a very different perspective with regard to schooling issues compared to other current participants. The 10 former athletes (F1 to F10) had left school, were all over the age of 18 and were able to provide their reflective experiences of being a high performance athlete whilst at school. The 10 former school-age athletes had been involved in a variety of sports including surf lifesaving, water polo, rugby league, royal lifesaving, swimming, soccer, sailing, surfing and kayaking (Table 2). Committing these athletes to interview was difficult as they had extremely hectic schedules, often combining high level sport with other demands such as family, sponsorship and work. For example, one interview of an adult surf lifesaving iron woman had to be conducted on the beach where she was training. All participants gave consent based on full information provided, and the promise of being de-identified. To that end all participants have been coded numerically.

2. Data Collection

Interviews were recorded on Livescribe™ pen, then transcribed and returned to the athlete for confirmation, before data analysis began. This was a semi-structured interview and the main questions posed to participants focused on their experiences of being high performance

school-age athletes, the problems they confronted in attempting to combine high level sport and schoolwork and who they perceived supported them to achieve their dual endeavours. This allowed each participant to incorporate any information that they felt relevant to the knowledge of what needs and problems athletes themselves regarded as significant in dealing with two lives.

3. Data Processing and Analysis

The process of data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) three phases of data reduction, data display and drawing conclusions. NVivo 9.2 program was used to give rigour to the analysis: to store the "primary textual data and to assist in coding, sorting and organising the text" (Veal, 2005, p.299). A four staged process adapted from Edhlund (2010) involved data being sorted from lower to higher order themes through processes involving description, topic, analytic and drawing conclusions. This approach enhanced the scope for analysing and organising data to optimise the development of explanations (Mangabeira, 1995). The NVivo 'tool kit' creates an "auditable 'footprint' of the progressive dialogue between the researcher and their data" (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012, p.5). Within the analytical tools available in the 'tool kit' of NVivo the specific statistical and analytical tools known as 'queries' were used to discern and interpret the meaning each participant spoke of with reference to each of the themes. These included the impact of managing school and sport, identifying who could help them to cope with this situation and what they felt they needed to be able to cope with their double life. After the queries were generated the results were then exported into Excel™ and SPSS™ to generate descriptives using Chi square analysis to generate numbers of coded references and percentage concentrations of data from participants. Ethics approval for this research was obtained from the University of the Sunshine Coast Human Research Ethics Committee (EC0029) approval number S/11/347.

Results

The major results that emerged from the data analysis concerning the issues that participants identified as important for high performance school-age athletes were categorised into five groups: these related to identified physical, social, educational, psychological and economic issues. These categories developed from the descriptors of the three main themes identified by the athletes concerning the impact of managing school and sport commitments, who they identified could help them to cope, and what they needed to be able to cope with their double life.

1. Physical

This was an important issue for most participants. In particular they identified problems related to ongoing tiredness and nutritional demands both in and out of school environments (Figure 1). One 15 year-old athlete specifically suggested that these two physical issues more than any other influenced the high performance school-age athletes in *'coping with the demands of their dual endeavours'* (C7). As another 15 year-old athlete stated, *'I'm always tired and sore'* (C6). One adult athlete shared that he *'constantly felt tired at school and I often fell asleep in classes'* (F1). Another adult athlete remembered that concerned teachers would detect him sleeping in the classroom and ask him *'Are you okay and getting enough sleep?'*(F5). C5 remarked that she constantly requires *'rest, hydration and sleep'* and C6 suggested there was a need for 'nap rooms' at school:

"There needs to be a room...not a sick room where there are germs etc... but a place when we can go when we are dog tired so we can just go and have a lie down and a nap in a real safe and comfortable place."(C6).

On the other hand, athletes referred to a broad knowledge of nutrition and health strategies which helped to counter their tiredness levels. For example one adult athlete said she needed to be *'very proactive in maintaining my health and body'* when she was at school (F3). Further, C9, the home-schooled student, said that he needed to *'keep my health up as I always have to train'*. Many athletes mentioned they were constantly rushing between training sessions and school. One participant did suggest that his nutrition was not optimal as he was literally *'eating your cereal between the training sessions in the morning and going to school whether it is in the car or at school itself'* (F1).

2. Social

The findings grouped under social included: procrastination, personal sacrifices, and social implications of peer pressure such as illegal use of drugs and alcohol. Notably, the most important social finding raised by the participants was that of wasting time. Remarkably this was a problem noted by one of the youngest athletes, who used the term 'procrastination', while others simply referred to this as 'time-wasting' in and out of school (Figure 1). For example, one 15 year-old athlete commented *'I put things off; I push it aside to the end of the week'* (C3). Others mentioned that putting things off was easy to slip into but in the end, to achieve in both sport and education, as one 15 year-old said, he just cannot *'procrastinate between schoolwork and sport'* (C7). C6 spoke of using social media (Facebook™) as a very easy way to put off commitments. She spoke of actually conducting 'research' into how much time she wasted on 'Facebooking':

“I had Facebook for possibly three quarters of the year and then in Term two I actually did a study on myself and I recorded the hours I spend on Facebook and times this by 30 so I had a monthly figure and averaged that out in percentages and then worked out I didn’t need to spend that much time on Facebook. And work out what I could be doing instead of Facebook like stretching, reading or getting ahead on study for a subject. I figured out that I spent 26% of my time on Facebook and I know this is a lot less than other kids and in my sport. I know some kids spend their whole study lesson on Facebook. So in Term two I deactivated my Facebook account and ever since then my academic and sporting results have increased” (C6).

Another term constantly used by the athletes was ‘sacrifices’; in particular *‘the major personal sacrifice for athletes was socialising’* (F1). One school-age athlete explained that their non-existent social life was not really a problem to her as it was *‘normality to me’* (C5). Additionally, accepting non-socialisation as normal allowed the athletes to feel that they *‘really don’t miss it’* (C5). For example, an adult athlete recalled she always had to be in bed early and she never went to *‘blue light discos or even an all night movie or things that kids that age would be doing’* (F3).

Illegal use of drugs and alcohol were mentioned by all athletes regardless of their age. An adult athlete said: *‘At my school drugs were rife and alcohol was rife’* (F2). Another adult athlete openly admitted that he relieved his stress levels by *‘smoking dope’*. Interestingly C4, a high performance school-age iron woman, also spoke about the *‘binge’* drinking going on at school parties.

3. Psychological

Remarkably, bullying was a socialisation issue that only female athletes spoke about. One female athlete emphasised that bullying was *‘bad and created troubles for her at school’* (F7). The tall poppy syndrome was even suggested by a 15 year-old athlete as the *‘constant teasing and taunts I endure from some of my school peers’* (C6). Jealousy was yet another reason for the bullying experienced by F7, a high performance royal lifesaver who stated:

“I got bullied from other students and teachers at my school as they were jealous that I achieved excellence in sport and education which others students in my school could never do” (F7).

On the other hand and associated with bullying, participants related their embarrassment with unequal treatment of each other at school. Most spoke of assistance and recognition only being afforded once they were successful, but not when they were working hard towards an event. F8, a recent Year 12 school leaver explained *‘but because other athletes didn’t have*

the same name as me or hadn't medalled like me so they didn't get the same attention' (F8).

The athletes clearly wanted equal assistance and recognition for both their educational and sporting achievements.

The mindset of the athletes was mentioned by some. Mindset is a psychological issue that tends to focus on the belief in one's personality to achieve (Dweck, 2006). Having a calm manner but also being *'a bit of a perfectionist'* was viewed as being of assistance by one the athlete (C4). A year 12 athlete expressed *'it helps to be in the same sort of familiar mindset with my other school friends who are athletes'* (C2). Additionally C2 felt there was a need to be in the midst of like-minded competitors that *'want the same'*.

4. Educational

With regard to school the athletes spoke about learning difficulties, missed class time, the need for one-on-one tutoring, the importance of mentors and the need for empathy. Seven of the current athletes spoke about the amount of class time missed to attend their high level sport commitments (C2 - C8). Missed class time would then create difficulties for the athlete in trying to catch up the schoolwork missed. With reference to this problem four of the former athletes referred to the importance of mentors and one-on-one tutoring in assisting them to deal with the pressure of missed class time in school (F3, F8-10).

5. Economic

Economic issues for three of the former athletes were associated with the low socio-economic status levels of the school they attended. In particular two of the former athletes spoke of their experiences in a low economic status school as having insufficient facilities and equipment. One stated that *'my school was highly socio-economically disadvantaged as it had hardly any facilities or equipment like a gym for my high level sport'* (F10). Furthermore, all of the current athlete participants were concerned for their parents having to organise their work around the drop off and pick up of training sessions, as one stated *'mum only had a job that fits around dropping and picking me up from training sessions'*(C3).

Discussion

The results from this investigation reveal the main issues that high performance school-age athletes identify as problematic in their efforts to manage the demands of both school and sport. Literature, especially with regards to stressors of professional athletes specific to elite sport and sport systems and/or policies, is outlined by such authors as Aquilina and Henry (2010), Noblet, Rodwell and McWilliams (2003), Fletcher, Hanton, Mellalieu and Neil (2012) and Hanton, Fletcher and Coghlan (2005). These articles are concerned with

professional players, athletes and performers and center on different ages and cultural contexts. For example, Aquilina and Henry's (2010) study is set in the UK and outlines the demands that elite athletes (18+ years of age) in tertiary institutions encounter. Such pressures elite and professional players in the UK programs encounter vary from the difficulties Australian school-age high performance athletes (15-17 years of age) confront in combining their dual endeavours of school and high level sport commitment as outlined in this article.

This discussion examines these findings with regard to two pertinent perspectives for high performance school-age athletes. First the implications of these findings for athletes themselves are discussed and secondly the characteristics of an athlete-friendly school are described.

1. Pressures and demands - The athletes' perspective

One of the major issues that surfaced from these findings related to physical symptoms of chronic tiredness and soreness (Figure 1). Other research studies such as Walshaw (2010) and Campion (2011) have also identified specific issues related to fatigue and recovery with reference to the gruelling early morning training sessions required by high performance athletes. The one crucial ingredient Campion indicated that the strenuous training schedule of the high performance athlete was offset by a day off training on a Sunday to avoid fatigue and give their body the time to recover. These statements complement the evidence from the athletes in this study who reported excessive fatigue from intense training sessions.

Ironically this issue is like the "elephant in the room", as these symptoms appear to be known by everyone but no one seems to acknowledge them or to do anything about them. Young athletes spend a lot of time in school and at home whilst physically exhausted and this impacts on their school, social and sporting life. The first implication for the athlete is to recognise and monitor their responses to the physical demands of their school and sporting lives. The findings of Blanksby and Whipp (2004) were reinforced by this research. These young people need advice on how to recognise and manage themselves physically and nutritionally, to counteract the tiredness and soreness they experience. Early detection and management of these symptoms may help to prevent the athlete from overtraining problems, overuse injuries, and burnout (Gould & Dieffenbach, 2002). Parents need to be proactive by not treating the athlete's fears ambivalently. Teachers need to be more proactive and alert parents about their observations of the exhausted athlete in the classroom.

Another anticipated and complementary issue (Figure 1) also identified in other studies concerns the athlete's nutritional awareness. Several authors have noted the importance of wholesome healthy and nutritious food and fluid intake for the athlete (Education Department of Victoria, 2006; Manore et al. 2009; & Moneghetti, 1993). However unlike other studies, former athletes in this study emphasised the necessity of being aware of the nutritional intake necessary to maintain high levels of performance. This may be attributed to former athletes having the ability of hindsight and acquiring more information and knowledge that is required to manage their health and peak performance in sport.

The most disquietening social issue was that of procrastination (Figure 1). The findings in this study reveal an important gap between what other researchers have reported and what the athletes themselves say. In the literature the problem is called 'time management' (e.g. Christensen & Sørensen, 2009) but this term was never used by any of the athletes in their interviews. They used and understood the terms 'time-wasting' or 'procrastination'. The current athletes in this study indicated that they required down time simply to switch off their mind and bodies after their demanding daily physical and mental workloads. However at the other end of the time continuum is the problem of wasting time. *Down time* comes at the cost of lost time for study or 'catching up'. These athletes revealed they were their own worst enemy when it came to deliberately wasting time on social media. The onus of responsibility for the amount of time using social media clearly lies with the athlete. With the popularity of engaging with peers through social media the managing or setting of 'time limits' is difficult for many. Most young athletes have smart devices that have an application that automatically sends reminders and alerts them to time limits. In this way the athlete could take control of their time management. Parents have to be aware of the 'double-edged sword' of social media outlets. Teachers also need to remind these students that time wasted on the social media site impacts on the timely completion of school work.

The social life of young athletes is another area that challenges their time management skills. Hemery (1991) and Penney (2000) suggested that athletes believe that sacrificing social life is a matter of preference where they can benefit more than they may lose. Current athletes in this study concurred with this finding and actually admitted they never went to social night outs such as blue light discos like other young people their age. However, given a choice they probably would opt not to attend such social activities as they believed that this was a sacrifice they had to accept to pursue their high level sport. In many instances athletes have witnessed other siblings in high level sport 'burn the candle at both ends' which ultimately resulted in those athletes dropping out of sport altogether. On the other hand, athletes in this

study were more upset by the sacrifices of family life that they miss out on, due to training demands. Unlike the findings of other research studies some athletes actually noted the difficult trade off ‘sacrifices’ they have made when they had to choose between family dinner nights and high level sport commitments (Figure 1).

While current athletes were conscious of and often worried about, parental financial commitments, they spoke more about the issue of what Crawford (2009) calls being ‘time poor’. This means that parents have difficulties supporting their children, even in apparently simple things like being available to drop off, pick up and attend all the training and competitions. This creates anxiety for these athletes, or forces them to rely on others, which can create greater stress as these others may not understand their ‘timetables’ and commitments. Also these arrangements may affect their diets as they are happy to eat in their own car but not someone else’s. These may seem small points but the consistency and emphasis placed on this issue by the participants indicated that this was a very important issue for them.

Mindset is a positive attribute that could motivate school-age high performance students to improve and reach both personal and professional ambitions (Dweck, 2006). If students have a stronger personal belief this may help them to attain their goals in life. The main issue is that athletes with a ‘growth mindset’ find “success in learning and improving, not just winning” (Dweck, 2006, p. 107). Former athletes were able to provide greater insight through reflecting on mindset in relation to improving their performances in their sport and at school. Additionally, it was the former athletes that also recognised that with a positive mindset they could set goals to aid with life after sport options (Anderson, 2009).

Interestingly the smoking of cannabis was mentioned by some athletes as a mechanism for stress relief. A combination of stress and peer pressure to conform may be a catalyst for athletes who chose to use drugs and alcohol. Adolescent pressure to conform can range from fashion to drugs and alcohol. Some peer pressure may be positive and help challenge the athletes to motivate them to achieve their best performances. However as Hemery (1991) contends often as in the case of ‘binge’ drinking the young athletes is doing a foreign activity that is against their sense of what is right and wrong. This can lead to internal personal conflict and increase the sense of psychological stress for such athletes.

The implications of the issues identified by the athletes in this study, whether social, physical or physiological, amplify the existing pressures and demands placed on them when combining the dual expectations of high level sport and school.

2 Characteristics of an ‘Athlete friendly school’

The second area of discussion focuses on the connections of these research findings to patterns of schooling and specifically on identifying the characteristics of what might be considered to be an ‘athlete friendly school’. Such a school is a response to the educational, social, physical, mental and economic themes that have been identified by the responses of the high performance school-age athletes in this study.

First, the school characteristics must include a four-way communication channel around these five themes. The four nodes of communication are athlete-student, parents, teachers and school administration. The school administration should include a well-defined pastoral care focus on the athlete, which supports the athlete through proactive programs, goal setting, mentoring, and ongoing contact. This requires the development of personalised study programs that support high performance school-age athletes in all their endeavours.

The social issues around the athlete’s life and their socialisation skills are nurtured through a program of personal development and transition education. The school can help the athlete to manage the effects of the physical demands they experience by providing them with essential knowledge about how to monitor and look after themselves in high level sport. Strategies to assist with this may include amenities that can facilitate their recovery regimens while they are engaged at school. This may include specialist nutrition outlets and even, as one athlete recommended, a nap room.

Psychological issues include monitoring the mental health and welfare of the athlete in meeting the school’s academic and co-curricular demands. The school also needs to address issues of equity and recognition that the athletes have mentioned. Very careful attention to evidence of bullying, developing appropriate coping mechanisms, and pertinent information about the use of illegal drugs and alcohol, especially for female athletes, is clearly a priority for schools with high-performance athletes. Mindset and personal achievement programs could enhance understanding and education for the parents, schools, coaches and athletes concerning undue pressures on athletes to achieve.

In particular individualised educational, social and psychological strategies can assist schools to set benchmarks and guidelines for students who endeavour to combine high level sport and school.

Conclusion

This paper has reported on the pressures felt by Australian high performance athletes who are still at school. In exploring this phenomenon, the theme of the hyphenated individual has been

a useful framework by which to gain a better understanding of the pressures on these young people. The findings of this study have reflected the ‘voice’ of the athletes themselves and in doing so have helped to gain a better understanding of the nature of their lives and the problems that they face. Recognition by schools, parents and sports bodies of the unique dilemma that faces these young people can help to alleviate many of the pressures that impact negatively on them while allowing them to reach the pinnacle of their education and the sporting and educational performances that they work so hard to achieve.

Recommendations

The practical findings derived from this study that relate to the real world setting of sport and exercises include:

- Schools, parents, and coaches need to be more aware of high-performance school age athletes’ views of the pressures they experience, in particular tiredness, nutritional awareness, procrastination, bullying and personal sacrifices.
- Ignoring, or playing down the problems raised by these student athletes may have serious repercussions for their health, social welfare, and school and sporting performances.
- The need to assist and monitor students in the management of time – and adopt language they use rather than adult language: for example use the term ‘avoid time-wasting’ rather than ‘time management’.
- Schools with high-performance school-age athletes should attempt to become ‘athlete friendly schools’ in terms of policy and practice particularly with regard to a proactive and individualised pastoral care program for such athletes.

Highlights

- Talented school-age athletes struggle to balance their lives in sport and school.
- Athletes face specific social, psychological, physical, and educational issues.
- Ironically both lives strengthen their sense of identity, purpose and well-being.
- Schools should adopt ‘athlete-friendly’ guidelines to help students cope with both.

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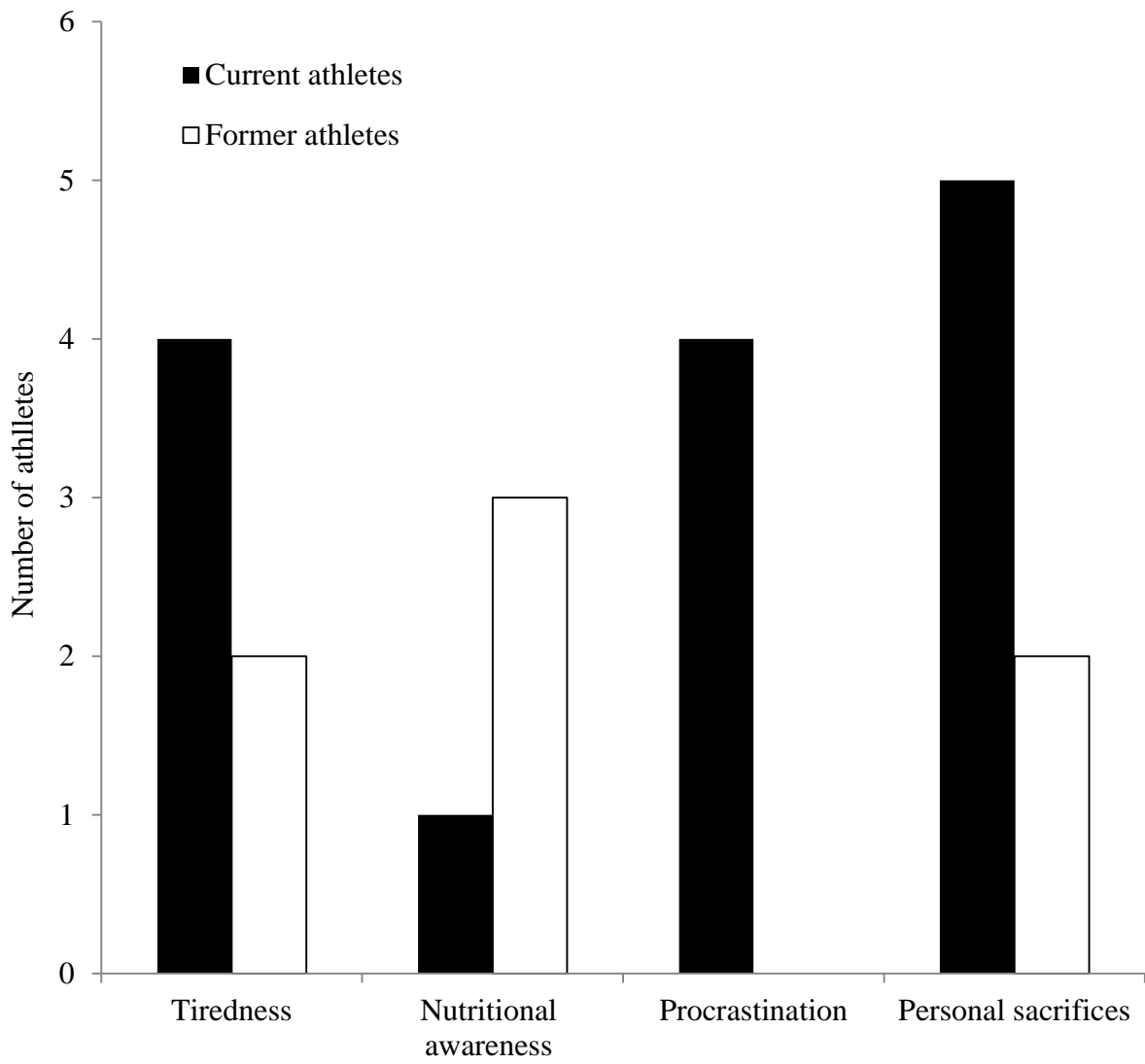


Figure 1: Athlete physical and social issues: Reports of Tiredness, Nutritional awareness, Procrastination and Personal Sacrifices

Table 1. Demographics of current school-age athletes (6=females:3=males)

Participant	Schooling model	Age	Gender	Sporting Attributes
C1	Government	16	F	NTID* Kayaking
C2	Specific pathway	17	F	Age level Dance
C3	Non-Government	15	F	Age level Gymnastics
C4	Non-Government	17	F	National Surf Life Saving
C5	Non-Government	17	F	International Ocean Ski Paddling
C6	Non-Government In-school scholarship	15	F	Age level Swimming
C7	Government In-school excellence	15	M	Age level Rugby League
C8	Non-Government	17	M	Age level Water Polo
C9	Home schooled	17	M	International Surfing

Table 2. Demographics of former school-age athletes* (6=females:4=males)

Participant	Schooling model	Gender	Sporting Attributes
F1	Government	M	Water Polo : Olympic level
F2	Government	M	Kayaker : Olympic level
F3	Government	F	Surf Life Saving: International
F4	Non-Government	F	Surfing: World Champion
F5	Government In-school scholarship	M	Sailing: International level
F6	Government In -school Excellence	F	Association Football: International level
F7	Government	F	Royal Life Saving: International
F8	Non-Government	F	Surf Life Saving: National level
F9	Non-Government In-school scholarship	F	Swimmer: Olympic level
F10	Government	M	Rugby League: International