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## **A FOOTBALLERS EXPERIENCE: THE MANAGEMENT OF ORGANISATIONAL STRESS**

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### **Abstract**

Female football is a field with limited previous research. Football is the most played sport in Norway and the most watched sport, at least for male football, but with little research on participation in the females' elite league. Their position in the football society as a whole has been surpassed by male football and engagement by society in general is low. With little media coverage, semi-professional teams and few economic incentives, the players' and clubs' participation in the sport has many limitations.

The purpose of this case study was to enhance our knowledge of how a club's management perceives their players role in the organisation and how they are affected by that position. Furthermore the study wished to identify organisational stressors and elaborate on the experiences of elite female footballers. Focus was given to the players' experiences with organisational stress on the bases of how the club's management worked with and addressed stress issues, if they did so. This was to identify if the players experiences corresponded with the club's perception of the issues, which could have implications on how the club works on a day to day basis.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical background for this study is made up of different themes within the areas Sport Management and Sport Psychology. The Sport Management theoretical background consists of the stakeholder theory as described by Donaldson and Preston (1995) and Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) who illustrate the theory's descriptive values. One psychological theory that fits neatly into this theoretical framework is the concept of organisational stress as a detrimental factor for player perceptions and success. The primary Sport Psychology theory used has been Fletcher, Hanton and Mellalieu's (2006) organisation stress theory.

## Method

The first month was used solely on observing the players, coaches and staff. Interviews were conducted with the players over a period of 3 months. Club representatives were interviewed once the player interviews were completed. Two interview guides were created, one for the players and one for the club representatives. Both guides were created on the basis of theoretical framework and the initial observations. During the interview process, both guides were slightly altered due to stressors that the author had not thought of prior to the interviews. In total 9 players and 3 Club representatives were interviewed. In addition, a control interview was conducted with 1 player in another club.

## Results and Discussion

The preliminary results show that the primary stakeholders for the Club are the players and business partners. As a primary stakeholder, the players have a certain power they can use to influence the Club's decision. However, it became apparent that the economy of the Club limited the options the Club had to meet the needs of the players. Sometimes, the needs of the Club must come before the needs of the players.

Limited economic resources in elite female football in Norway has contributed to organisational stress becoming a major factor to be considered. All the players expressed an opinion that the strain put on them from the organisation and its surroundings were quite extensive. Especially the total strain of having a job and/or school, as well as being a fulltime footballer, is the one factor that affected the players most. Other factors such as travel, injuries, facilities, media, teammates and practices had little negative strain on the players. On the other hand, the coach, leaders and Club economy did have some impact on the players. Indications show that a lack of feedback is the most common stressor. The total load of combining football, school and work has the most negative detrimental strain on the players.

When one looks at the immediate situation of elite female football in Norway, there is little the Club can do to improve on the stress situation. The practical implications of the study show that a club with limited economic resources must take into account the organisational stressors each player experiences. By identifying the stressors that the players perceive as being significant and having the club address these stressors in an effective manner, may reduce the overall feeling of stress amongst the players. Elite female football in Norway will continue to struggle to create a professional environment where players can focus solely on participating at the highest level unless support from the national federation and media generate an interest amongst Norwegian citizens and the sponsor market.

## References

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