

Indiana interscholastic athletic directors perceptions of occupational stress

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Abstract 33**

The modern work place is filled with deadlines, frustrations, and emotional pressures that can trigger the stress response within the body. Each job has its own particular set of daily activities unique to the position and vocation. The daily challenges or stressors in the work place can sometimes be motivating and at other times overwhelming. Stress, if managed properly, can be harnessed to accomplish difficult tasks in the work place, however, when the stress response is triggered on a regular basis, the body can become overwhelmed and suffer a serious health breakdown. The proper management of stress at work and in our daily lives equates to quality of living and productivity (Burton et. al, 2006). Stress management begins with stress identification: knowing and understanding the types of stress particular to the occupation in question.

One position that is subjected to high stress is that of the Athletic Director. As the basic mission of the secondary public school has expanded and continues to expand, so did and so will the responsibilities of the Athletic Director. The Athletic Director holds a vital position in the scope of the total school program. The responsibilities of the position have grown so large that a full time administrator is needed to administer the athletic program. Not only is the Athletic Director an administrator, but at times, must operate as a business person. Fuoss and Toppman (1977) found that athletic administration has evolved into a highly sophisticated big business. The administrator must possess skills and knowledge most often associated with business administration. Athletic budgets, in secondary schools, deal with large sums of money and receipts/expenditures that must be accounted for. To the Athletic Director, this means performing increasing managerial functions such as planning, budgeting, organizing, staging, coordinating, reporting, innovating, and representing.

Not only are Athletic Directors susceptible to high stress, Railey and Tschauner (1993) stated that managers are more prone to stress than other workers due to the problem-solving nature of their occupations, whether in schools, fitness centers, or sports programs. They concluded, managers are constantly faced with decisions which cause stress.

It is important for Athletic Directors to manage stressors properly; what types of stress plague this particular position in sport management? Do certain variables or qualities of the individual affect the types of stress experienced? The purpose of this study was to investigate the sources of occupational stress for Indiana Interscholastic Athletic Directors. The variables of age, the number of years served as Athletic Director, the number of hours per day assigned to Athletic Director duties, and the size of the school by student population were given special focus.

The questionnaire for assessing occupational stress perceived by Interscholastic Athletic Directors in Indiana included a modified version of the Administrative Stress Index (ASI) developed by Gmelch and Swent at Washington State University. The questionnaire measured the multidimensional nature of stress with regard to four factors: role-based stress, task-based stress, boundary-spanning stress, and conflict-mediating stress. Role-based stress items assessed the Athletic Director's beliefs and perceptions regarding functioning within the school system while task-based stress identified stress arising from execution of routine Athletic Director tasks. Boundary-spanning stress involved external issues like budgeting and scheduling games, and conflict-mediating stress focused on differences where parents and students are concerned (Koch et al., 1982). The Indiana Interscholastic Directors were asked to respond to 35 work-related situations by circling the number on a five-point likert-type scale that appropriately described their level of perceived stress. A total of 288 (74%) of the 389 Indiana Interscholastic Athletic Directors responded to the questionnaire.

The resulting data were treated both descriptively and statistically and a direct multiple regression was employed. The descriptive analysis of the ASI indicated that Indiana Interscholastic Athletic Directors found task-based roles as most stressful. Conflict-mediating stress was also an area of serious concern. Role-based stress was deemed as the item with the lowest mean. In the ASI statistical analysis, using a direct multiple regression, no significant relationships between perceived stress and the variables, age, number of years served, hours per day assigned, and size of the school by student population, were determined. None of the four factors of the stress task-based, role-based, boundary-spanning, and conflict-mediating were found to be significant.

The implications of this study are two-fold. Task-based and conflict-mediating stressors scored highest as perceived stress factors. Interscholastic Athletic Directors can identify task-based and conflict-mediating activities, expect higher stress and cope appropriately. Age, number of years served, hours per day assigned and size of school by population made no significant difference in the way Athletic Director's perceive occupational stress. This is significant; regardless of these variables, Athletic

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Directors must be ready to cope with the same types of high-stress tasks in order to promote health and productivity.

This study begins several threads for more research in the field; stress management in every sport management position is an important skill for productivity and quality of life optimization. Further studies should be conducted in other states and other areas of sport management positions to determine if the stressors felt by Interscholastic Athletic Directors are similar or different. Instruments should be developed and field tested that deal specifically with occupational stress in the sport management work place. A study should be conducted that deals with the effects of occupational stressors and coping strategies of males versus females sport management positions. A better understanding of how sport managers of various levels are experiencing stress similarly or differently can lead to better company and self-employed coping strategies.