

**A Qualitative Exploration of the Influence of High Lifetime Stressor Exposure on
Sports Performers Interpretations of Daily Life Stressors**

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Abstract

Research has found that lifetime stressor exposure increases the risk for mental and physical health problems. Although important, previous research has predominantly used self-report questionnaires, which only assess stressor exposure at a single point in time. To address this limitation, we used a longitudinal study design to explore how historical exposure to high lifetime stress influences sport performers' interpretations of, and responses to, daily life stressors. We identified participants in the top 10% of lifetime stressor count and severity, as assessed by the Stress and Adversity Inventory and the Sport Stress Assessment Module. 298 sport performers (153 male; $M_{age} = 30.71$ years, $SD = 13.31$) completed these measures, and seven participants (3 female; $M_{age} = 31.86$ years, $SD = 8.65$) who had experienced high lifetime stress completed daily audio diaries for a 28-day period about their interpretations of, and responses to, daily life stressors. We analyzed the data using interpretative phenomenological analysis and identified six group experiential themes: (1) hyperfixation; (2) disproportionate responses to stressors; (3) self-reliance leading to social isolation; (4) unrealistically high expectations of self and others; (5) overly empathetic to others; and (6) hypervigilance to future stressors. This study extends prior research by utilizing daily audio diaries to capture longitudinal data, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how historical exposure to stressors influence responses to daily life stressors. Consequently, practitioners can use these findings to educate sport performers on utilising more adaptive responses to acute daily life stressors.

Keywords: audio diaries, adversity, life stress, longitudinal, qualitative

1 **Lay Summary (50 words):**

2 We used a longitudinal design to explore how historical exposure to stressors
3 influences responses to daily stressors. Sport performers responded by hyperfixating,
4 engaging in self-reliance, having high expectations, being overly empathetic and being
5 hypervigilant. Results offer important implications for supporting sport performers in
6 utilising more adaptive responses to daily stressors.

7

8 **Implication for Practice:**

- 9 • Interventions should foster a sense of community among sport performers by building
10 resonance and reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness.
- 11 • Sport performers should be directed towards prioritizing their mental health and well-
12 being vs. short-term gains (e.g., increased productivity).
- 13 • Video narratives are a novel and alternative way to implement stress management
14 techniques to help sport performers appraise, manage, and deal with stressors more
15 effectively.

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A Qualitative Exploration of the Influence of High Lifetime Stressor Exposure on Sports Performers Interpretations of Daily Life Stressors

The prevalence of mental health issues among athletes has been reported to range from 25% to 43% (Gouttebarga et al., 2016), largely attributed to the significant pressures they face both during and outside their sporting careers. Within the sporting environment, athletes are often exposed to various stressors, which can be related to their competitive performance (e.g., underperformance), the sporting organization within which they operate (e.g., excessive external pressure to perform), and personal non-sporting life events (e.g., bereavement; Arnold & Fletcher, 2021). Notwithstanding the importance of better understanding the type of stressor currently encountered, to date little research has explored the multidimensional nature of lifetime stressor exposure (Slavich & Shields, 2018). Specifically, research has predominantly focused on sport performers' experiences of a specific life event (e.g., injury), as opposed to understanding the combined and cumulative effect of sporting and non-sporting stressors over the entire lifespan (Fletcher, 2019). This is relevant given that exposure to stressors inevitably leads to other stressors and can influence how sport performers respond to, and cope with, future stressful life events (Howells & Fletcher, 2015). Indeed, sport performers do not live in a vacuum, but rather, function within highly complex environments which exert major influences on themselves and their performances (Hardy et al., 1996). As a result, practitioners are frequently required to support athletes to cope with a concoction of demands and pressures while also attempting to minimize the impact of these on their health, well-being, and performance.

Outside of the sporting context, the relationship between lifetime stressor exposure and health-related outcomes has received considerable attention (cf. Hölzge et al., 2018). The term lifetime stressor exposure refers to the "joint or combined effects of stressors occurring throughout life, including both acute negative life events (e.g., job loss) and persistent

chronic difficulties (e.g., ongoing financial problems)” (Mayer et al., 2019, p. 211). Despite the acknowledged importance of lifetime stressor exposure on health, very few studies have assessed an individual’s lifetime stress exposure accurately, given the notable absence of an instrument to assess the construct effectively. Recognizing this gap, Slavich and Shields (2018) developed the Stress and Adversity Inventory for Adults (Adult STRAIN) in an attempt to adequately assess lifetime stressor exposure. Since the adoption of the Adult STRAIN, research has found that exposure to stressors over the lifespan has been associated with mental (e.g., Slavich et al., 2019) and physical (e.g., Cazassa et al., 2020) health complaints. More specifically, some studies suggest that the severity of stressors experienced is a more significant predictor of health-related issues compared to the total count of stressors experienced (e.g., Slavich et al., 2019). Focusing the lens on the sporting context, more recently, McLoughlin et al. (2022a) developed a Sport Stress Assessment Module (Sport SAM) to be used alongside the Adult STRAIN. Using the Sport SAM, sport-specific stressors experienced over the lifetime (e.g., injury) were found to be associated with symptoms of depression, anxiety, and physical and mental health complaints, but not well-being or subjective sports performance (McLoughlin et al., 2022a).

To extend McLoughlin et al.’s (2022a) work, researchers have begun to study the mechanisms linking lifetime stressor exposure with health, well-being, and performance. For example, McLoughlin et al. (2024a) used qualitative methods to provide a more in-depth understanding of *how* lifetime stressors affect sport performers’ health. Psychological (e.g., maladaptive coping strategies), social (e.g., difficulties in building relationships), and behavioural (e.g., engagement in risky behaviours) factors were suggested to link high lifetime (non-sport and sport-specific) stressor exposure to poorer health. In addition, research has also highlighted that sport performers who experience more severe lifetime stressors (non-sport and sport-specific) are more likely to habitually appraise stressful events

as a threat (vs. a challenge), leading to poorer health outcomes (e.g., depression; McLoughlin et al. 2022a). When examining possible biological mechanisms, researchers have begun to examine how historical exposure to lifetime stressors influence responses to acute stressors (e.g., job interview). Indeed, McLoughlin et al. (2022b) found that exposure to a moderate number of lifetime (non-sport and sport-specific) stressors was associated with adaptive cardiovascular reactivity (e.g., a temporary increase in heart rate) to an acute laboratory-based social stressor, whereas exposure to a low or high number of stressors was related to maladaptive reactivity (e.g., a blunted response in heart rate) to an acute laboratory-based social stressor. Further, greater lifetime stressor exposure has been associated with blunted cortisol and heightened dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) reactivity to an acute laboratory-based stressor (Lam et al., 2019). Although these results advance our understanding of how lifetime stressor exposure is associated with acute psychophysiological stress reactivity, utilising qualitative methods may help researchers further understand how historical exposure to stressors influences responses to acute daily life stressors. Given that previous studies have only considered retrospective responses to stressors (e.g., Lam et al., 2019; McLoughlin et al., 2024b), research is needed to prospectively consider how historical exposure to a high number of lifetime stressors influences sport performers' interpretations of, and responses to, various acute daily life stressors.

There are a number of limitations to the existing literature. To date, research has primarily relied on retrospective self-report questionnaires (e.g., STRAIN and Sport SAM; McLoughlin et al., 2022a) to assess stressor exposure at a single point in time. Although such tools are affordable and easy to implement, they may be prone to memory recall bias and lack the depth of more detailed methods like in-depth interviews (Dohrenwend, 2006). Notably, our study also uses a retrospective design to assess lifetime stressor exposure via self-report questionnaire, however, this is complemented by a prospective, longitudinal audio diary

method to explore how individuals with high exposure to lifetime stressors interpret and respond to acute daily stressors in real time. This mixed approach aims to address limitations of past research by integrating retrospective and longitudinal methods to better capture the dynamic and fluctuating nature of the stress process (Lazarus, 1999).

Therefore, the present study explores how historical exposure to high lifetime stress, assessed retrospectively using self-report measures, might influence sport performers' interpretations of, and responses to, various acute daily life stressors (e.g., sporting competition), which were explored prospectively using a daily diary approach.

Method

Research Design

This study is underpinned by ontological relativism and epistemological constructionism, which suggests that reality is multiple, created, and mind dependent while knowledge is subjective and constructed. In accordance with these philosophical assumptions, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to explore how historical exposure to high lifetime stress may influence sport performers' interpretations of, and responses to, various acute daily life stressors. IPA is based on three key conceptual perspectives: phenomenology, which focuses on understanding the specific lived experiences; hermeneutics, which focuses on the process of interpretation; and idiography, which focuses on the particular. Indeed, Smith (2011) argues that IPA is considered useful when exploring complex or novel phenomenon (i.e., how historic exposure to stressors influences present reality) and so it is deemed appropriate for our study aim.

Participants

Criterion-based purposeful sampling was used to identify participants who met predetermined criteria for addressing the research question (i.e., exposure to high lifetime stress). This fulfils assumptions consistent with IPA research in obtaining a homogenous

sample (Smith, 2011). To ensure participants had experienced a high number of severe lifetime stressors, the Adult STRAIN (see Slavich & Shields, 2018) and Sport SAM (see McLoughlin et al., 2022a) was used to assess exposure to lifetime (non-sport and sport-specific) stressors. Quantitative data was collected between August 2023 – February 2024.

Participants were recruited into this study if they: (a) were aged 18 or older; (b) had been training and/or competing in a sport at club level or above over the past 12 months; and (c) had access to the internet to complete the online questionnaire. The participants who received the Adult STRAIN and Sport SAM consisted of 298 sport performers (153 male, 143 female, 2 preferred to self-describe) between the ages of 18 and 75 ($M_{age} = 30.71$ years, $SD = 13.31$). In line with the purpose of the study, we identified 21 participants reporting the top 10% of lifetime stressor count (i.e., which was calculated by summing the number of stressors experienced) and severity (i.e., which was calculated by summing the perceived severity of the stressors experienced) as assessed by the Adult STRAIN (Slavich & Shields, 2018) and the Sport SAM (McLoughlin et al., 2022a). This approach is similar to prior research (e.g., Barnes et al., 2021).

Seven participants (3 female, 4 male), aged between 24 and 44 ($M_{age} = 31.86$ years, $SD = 8.65$), agreed to take part in the second phase of the study (i.e., daily audio diaries) from the 21 contacted (e.g., 33.3% response rate). The daily audio diary data was collected between March 2024 – April 2024. All participants had attained at least an undergraduate degree, with over half of the participants being educated to a postgraduate level or above. All participants had non-manual jobs, working within data and technology, teaching and researching, and journalism. All participants identified as White British. The seven participants were from a range of individual (e.g., kickboxing, trampolining) and team (e.g., rugby, football) sports with an average of 14.86 years ($SD = 7.60$) of experience in their sport. Participants represented a range of competitive levels ($n = 4$ competing at an

international level, $n = 1$ competing at a regional level, $n = 1$ competing at county level, and $n = 1$ competing at a university level). These participants were deemed to have experienced a high count of lifetime stressors ($M = 50.00$, $SD = 17.76$; scale runs from 0-166) and severity ($M = 100.86$, $SD = 39.57$; scale runs from 0-265), when compared to the average count ($M = 18.57$, $SD = 15.56$) and severity ($M = 44.08$, $SD = 35.90$) of lifetime (non-sport and sport-specific) stressors experienced by the original sample of 298 sport performers. Consistent with IPA, a brief description of the participants in this study is included in the Supplementary Materials. This sample was consistent with Smith and colleagues' (2022) recommendation of recruiting between three and 10 participants for an IPA study.

Data Collection

Following institutional ethical approval (Application ID: 1735775), we recruited participants using social media and our existing contacts. Once identified, participants received a link to the online survey which took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Prior to completing the survey, participants were informed of their ethical rights through an information sheet and subsequently provided their informed consent.

Participants who met the inclusion criteria (i.e., top 10% of lifetime [non-sport and sport-specific] stressor count or severity) were invited to participate in the second part of this study: daily audio diaries. Participants were asked to record approximately 20 audio diary entries over a 4 week period (i.e., 5 recordings per week). This frequency was informed by studies such as Didymus and Fletcher (2012), who required competitive swimmers to complete written diaries daily for 28 days, and Crozier and Cassell (2016), who asked participants to record audio diaries twice weekly for two weeks. We determined that this frequency (i.e., 5 recordings per week) would provide sufficient data while balancing participant burden. This approach ensured comprehensive coverage of experiences throughout the week while preserving the immediacy and richness of real-time audio diary

1 reflections. Participants were asked to record their audio diaries at the end of each day so they
2 could reflect upon any stressors or demands experienced.

3 This method of data collection was chosen as audio diaries are becoming more widely
4 utilized in a variety of social science disciplines (Didymus & Fletcher, 2012), and has proved
5 valuable in illuminating experiences of stress and coping in sporting populations (e.g.,
6 Tamminen & Holt, 2010). Audio diaries are recognized as a rigorous and valid method of
7 data collection due to their ability to capture real-time, in-depth, and nuanced participant
8 experiences. They provide researchers with access to sense-making processes during periods
9 of change, allowing for the immediate and accurate collection of data (Monrouxe, 2009).
10 Compared to written diaries, audio diaries reduce participant burden, facilitating ease of
11 completion, and minimizing attrition rates (Markham & Couldry, 2007). A key strength of
12 audio diaries is their ability to minimize researcher influence, thereby enhancing the
13 authenticity and validity of participant responses (Monrouxe, 2009). This reduction in
14 external influence makes them particularly effective for collecting data on private, sensitive,
15 or otherwise inaccessible experiences, ensuring a more naturalistic representation of lived
16 experiences. Additionally, the fluidity of spoken responses in audio diaries help overcome
17 limitations associated with traditional self-report methods, which often rely on retrospective
18 recall. The minimal cognitive processing required before recording allows for the capture of
19 more immediate and accurate reflections of participants' psychological states, enhancing the
20 reliability of the data collected (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Fisher & Noble, 2004).

21 Conceptually, audio diaries offer a unique methodological advantage in capturing the
22 cognitive and emotional processes involved in stress and coping experiences. Given their
23 longitudinal nature, they allow for both momentary and reflective insights, preserving the
24 dynamic and evolving nature of these experiences (Crozier & Cassell, 2016). In line with
25 Lazarus' (1999) argument that stress and coping are fluid processes, audio diaries provide a

methodologically robust approach to gathering rich, discursive, and narrative data over time. This mitigates the risks associated with reductive data collection strategies, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of complex psychological and social processes.

As per Holt and Dunn (2004), a prompt sheet was designed to provide structure and guidance for participants in completing the audio diaries (see Supplementary Materials). Although the researchers had some control over the direction of the content created by participants via the prompt sheet, this control was minimal and allowed them flexibility to tell their own stories (Day, 2017). Throughout the duration of the study, participants received text messages as a reminder on recording days. Following receipt of each audio diary, the lead researcher responded with a personalised message to each participant (e.g., ‘Great, thanks for this! Sorry to hear about your Grandma. I hope she is okay and you have a good couple of days off.’). At some points, the lead researcher also asked the participant to expand on certain points mentioned (e.g., ‘In your next audio diary, would you be able to expand on why you do not feel like you have capacity to form connections with others?’). Researchers have reported that the first few diary entries are often tentative and brief, providing little reflection on the meaning of activities, and so these prompts were predominantly used at the start of the data collection period (Jacelon & Imperio, 2005).

In total, we received 144 audio diaries over the 28-day period which equated to over 19 hours of audio diary recordings for all participants. On average, each audio diary recording lasted 8.65 minutes ($SD = 5.94$) ranging between 2 minutes 40 seconds to 28 minutes 21 seconds. The average number of audio diary entries was 20 per participant (range 17-22 entries). As a precautionary strategy, all participants were signposted to support services (e.g., Samaritans) within the information sheet at the start of the study, and a debrief sheet at the end. Audio diaries were transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

We used IPA to analyze the data (Smith et al., 2022). Data were analyzed on an ideographic case-by-case basis whereby we re-familiarized ourselves with the data collected from the first participant (i.e., quantitative and qualitative data). Specifically, we checked over their survey and then listened to all of the audio diaries recorded by the first participant in the order in which they were received, while reading and re-reading each transcript. When doing so important aspects of the transcripts were highlighted and initial thoughts and ideas were written down using the Comments function in Microsoft Word (e.g., inability to move on, emotional intensity, event repetition). This was repeated several times to ensure that we were familiar with the data. In line with the aim of this research to account for the longitudinal nature of experiences, we also noted whether participants responses were consistent or different over time. Next, we analyzed these exploratory notes to construct experiential statements which aimed to consolidate our thoughts (e.g., dwelling on specific situations). Utilizing OneNote for Windows, the first author started to group similar statements together (e.g., “dwelling on specific situations” and “repetitive thoughts about the same event” were clustered together). We then gave each cluster a title (e.g., rumination), which became that participant’s personal experiential themes (PETs). To clarify our thought process, we created a Microsoft Excel document highlighting the PETs for that participant, with each experiential statement detailed underneath, accompanied by direct quotes from the transcript. This process was repeated for each participant resulting in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with seven tabs highlighting each individuals PETs, experiential statements, and direct quotes.

Once this was completed for each participant, we started to look for patterns of similarities and differences across the PETs to create a set of group experiential themes (GETs). For example, ‘behaving immoderately’ and ‘rumination’ were grouped together to create the GET of ‘hyperfixation’. This is because both referred to being excessive,

unrestrained, or immoderate in their actions, thoughts, and behaviours. It was at this point where the second and third authors reviewed the analytical work, which led to a more coherent interpretation of the data (Smith et al., 2022). For example, it was highlighted that ‘emotional exhaustion’ was typically an outcome of rather than a response to stressors per se, and so this was removed as a GET. This resulted in six GETs that are presented herein.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

Consistent with ontological relativism and epistemological constructivism, various quality criteria were selected, combined, and utilised (Nizza et al., 2021). The worthiness of the topic was established given that this will be the first body of research that will longitudinally explore how historical exposure to high lifetime stress might influence sport performers’ interpretations of, and responses to, various daily life stressors. Rich rigor was sought by creating a prompt sheet for participants, keeping a reflexive journal, and engaging in critical dialogue. When creating the prompt sheet for participants, we incorporated previous research using audio diaries (e.g., Holt & Dunn, 2004), as well as asking senior researchers with experience in using audio diaries to review the prompt sheet. The first author updated a reflexive journal throughout data collection and analysis process to critically reflect upon her prior assumptions and biases. As a 28-year-old white woman from a working-class background, with no experience in elite sport, but understanding that this topic is one that she is personally invested in, served to contextualize how her positionality influenced the data collection and analysis process. The use of ‘critical friends’ also allowed the first author to give voice to her interpretations while others listened and offered feedback. For example, it was highlighted that ‘exaggerated responses to stressors’ and ‘apathy’ could be merged together to create ‘disproportionate responses to stressors’. Finally, this research aligns with quality indicators that are representative of IPA research (e.g., Smith et al., 2022).

Results

We developed six GETs to explore how historical exposure to high lifetime stress influences sport performers' interpretations of, and responses to, various acute daily life stressors. Each GET is introduced in the following narrative, with its sub-themes elaborated on and accompanied by illustrative quotes.

Hyperfixation

When reflecting on their past experiences, some participants suggested that they responded to daily stressors by fixating on certain tasks. Hyperfixation was viewed by these participants as complete absorption in a task, to a point where a person appears to completely ignore or 'tune out' everything else. The following quote by Bethany illuminates this notion whereby when presented with certain stressors (e.g., a social worker visiting), she became fully immersed in an irrelevant task to help her cope with the demands currently placed on her:

I'm super stressed today... I was cleaning the house all day for the social worker visit. If I have a clear goal and a clear guideline and a plan, I'm good. This is kind of a nightmare scenario for me because they are not telling me what they're looking for... Going into this very unknown situation is incredibly stressful. So I have hoovered everything twice. I have bleached the skirting boards. I have cleared the porch. I have done everything. I think I've killed the hoover. My cat is so upset with me. My cat has been in hiding behind furniture nearly all day. I think I might have bleach poisoned myself *[laughter]*. (Bethany, Audio Diary #2/#22).

Although hyperfixation can be beneficial in the short-term due to increased productivity, it was reported to also have the potential to create negative consequences and disrupt an individual's day-to-day functioning. The following quote highlights that when hyperfixation is not managed, an individual may invest more time and effort than they can afford causing them to neglect their personal needs:

1 The problem I have is that when [*a daily life stressor*] kicks in, then solving that
2 problem becomes the priority, and that's when any kind of training or anything else
3 that I might enjoy doing gets put on a back burner because it's deprioritised. I know
4 for my own welfare and in order to develop and get better at kickboxing I need to be
5 training regularly, and of course, you can very quickly get to a situation where you are
6 not training regularly because there's always something else that's higher priority.
7 That is something I really struggle with... Short-term, it serves me very well... But
8 then because you are in that sort of immediate firefighting mode, a lot of stuff ends up
9 not getting done. (Bethany, Audio Diary #2/#22).

10 As a result, the theme of hyperfixation suggests how participants can become
11 obsessively focused on a specific thought or worry, often to the detriment of other aspects of
12 their life. Indeed, the following quote from Charles highlights how they were fixated on a
13 minor event for a significant amount of time which prevented them from concentrating on
14 anything else:

15 In the last few years my decision-making is so bad. I really struggle making decisions.
16 Really easy life decisions, like do I walk or drive to the gym? Stuff like that. If I drive
17 and it's sunny, I'll be like oh, for fuck's sake, and I'll ruminate over that for an hour.
18 (Charles, Audio Diary #3/#20).

19 Fixating on specific thoughts and worries over a prolonged period, was reported to
20 lead to sleep deprivation, which impacted an individual's ability to cope with daily life
21 stressors:

22 I came off the pitch sort of feeling like it was a loss so I was just frustrated with
23 myself and I found that quite annoying and that would affect my sleep. I stayed awake
24 at night thinking about my performance and coulda/woulda/shoulda type thing... My

coach did say that I played well but I definitely felt frustrated in my own performance.
(Charles, Audio Diary #14/#20).

Additionally, it was clear that the constant rumination impacted Charles' mental health as it consequently led to feelings of excessive worry, exhaustion, irritability, and hopelessness. This can be demonstrated in the following quote:

That is really stressing me out... I don't know, I just feel completely numb at the moment. Like I am so over being injured. I was speaking to one of my mates and he was saying 'It's okay, you've been injured before. It's not that bad, it's fine. You can push through'... But I have been injured for 19-20 months of the last 36 months which is just ridiculous. I haven't played more than 3 games in a row without getting injured... It is just so disappointing and I'm like what have I done wrong? I'm annoyed that I didn't get the operation last time and I'm annoyed at the club for not doing that. But then maybe if I had done that then I wouldn't have got the opportunity with [club] when I did. It is just relentless. (Charles, Audio Diary #19/#20).

Disproportionate Responses to Stressors

When reflecting on their past experiences, some participants suggested that they typically responded to daily stressors in a disproportionate way. Specifically, participants reported having disproportionate psychological and physiological responses to stressors, including daily life stressors. The following quote from Lily outlines how a stressor experienced regularly (i.e., driving to work) could still trigger an anxious response and negative feelings, ultimately having a significant impact on her day:

The first stressor I have is in the morning is making sure that I am on time, which I absolutely hate. Even though it is something that I have to do consistently and I know there is going to be traffic. It does stress me out and makes me feel anxious... I sit in the car and I can feel the tension in my neck. There is quite a lot of swearing and it is

1 not a nice feeling... I obviously experience this stressor all the time. It does make me
2 more irate than a normal person and this then extends to the rest of my day as well.
3 (Lily, Audio Diary #2/#19).

4 In this situation, an exaggerated response to a daily life stressor can be particularly
5 harmful for health and well-being given that disproportionate responses prepare the body for
6 action that may be inappropriate to the specific scenario experienced. To exemplify, the
7 following quote highlights how exaggerated responses to stressors can impact an individual's
8 physical and emotional responses:

9 My meeting was at 11:30 and I've literally sat at my desk since 8 o'clock. Just
10 prepping a little bit, but from 8am to 11am I just think I am holding my breath the
11 entire time... When it is over, I can feel that stress leave my body. It is really weird
12 where I get really hot and flustered but that catharsis at the end is like oh I didn't
13 realise that my shoulders were all the way up to my ears. I don't realise that I have got
14 that tension and then it is a big sigh of relief. (Lily, Audio Diary #13/19).

15 In contrast, some participants explained how they were apathetic towards stressors
16 experienced, which was characterized by feeling indifferent towards traditionally stressful
17 encounters, feeling detached from the world, and surpassing emotions. To illustrate, Abbie
18 said:

19 I came home and I had an email from AWS [Amazon Web Services] basically saying
20 that I had a bill of like \$759 that was going to be like debited out of my account...
21 And the account that's linked to my AWS account is the bank account that has my
22 money that I pay for rent... I just like called the bank straight away, spoke to them,
23 was actually super calm... But as for being stressed, I was absolutely not stressed at
24 all considering that I have no money to pay the rent, I actually feel fine. (Abbie,
25 Audio Diary #1/#21).

Abbie went on to explain that these responses occurred as a direct result from her childhood experiences. The follow quotes expands on this further:

If I cried in front of my dad, he would get so angry, like, so unbelievably angry... He hit my brother because he was crying and would do the same to me, so I think that from there, I was like "oh, you can't be sad and you can't cry because that will make it would make it so much worse". So, I think, through that, I learnt that we just won't cry, we won't deal with these emotions. From 2010 to about 2020, I just never ever cried. It didn't matter what happened, like, I never ever cried. I had a lot of family funerals, my 10 year old cousin died, and I would never ever cry... I couldn't really feel anything. (Abbie, Audio Diary #14/#21).

Self-Reliance Leading to Social Isolation

When reflecting on their past experiences, some participants suggested that they typically responded to daily life stressors independently as they were overly self-reliant. Signs of being self-reliant, such as an unwavering insistence on autonomy, were found to create feelings of loneliness and isolation. This was characterized by an avoidance of asking for help, not relying on others to help, and often rejecting support from close friends and family. This is highlighted in the following quote:

I could have waited for other people to help out, ask around, but in reality no-one else had any more experience in this than I did. I did initially try to do it [*build furniture*] on my own rather than asking for help. That's probably something I've done a bit too much in the past... I want to shoulder responsibility of any mistakes on myself. I don't want to have other people to blame... If there is a problem I will definitely take it on my own shoulders and try and not rely on others. In the past I've been let down by others, so it's easier to take on responsibility yourself. (Gary, Audio Diary #1/#21).

1 In a subsequent audio diary entry, Gary highlighted how previous experiences in
2 childhood could have led to the development of being overly self-reliant, whereby significant
3 others have let them down:

4 The thing I've always looked at from my youth is that my father was never around. He
5 left when we were quite young and he would turn up periodically. Even in this series
6 of audio recordings, he has let me down. I made the mistake of expecting something
7 from him when I was younger, and so I kind of got to the point where I never
8 expected him to be there. I probably expect kind of, not the bare minimum, but close
9 to the minimum mostly from my father and it's kind of meant that I expect similar
10 from other people and when they step up, it's brilliant. So when other people help out,
11 that's great, and if not, I just have to deal with it myself. So I expect to have to deal
12 with everything myself and when other people step up, it's a really positive thing. I
13 just try and rely on myself and that's something you can control. (Audio Diary
14 #19/#21).

15 Furthermore, it was highlighted that because the majority of the participants in this
16 study demonstrated signs of self-reliance, this often restricted their ability to form
17 connections with others, which subsequently led to feelings of isolation. By nature, close
18 relationships with others were interdependent and so participants found it extremely difficult
19 to form new friendships and relationships with others. The following quote highlights how
20 being overly self-reliant led to feelings of loneliness and isolation:

21 It's been alright, like, the lads are nice enough... Forming connections has been hard.
22 I spoke about that last relationship I was in, and obviously it had a really huge effect
23 on me... And since that point, I've struggled to make connections with new people in
24 general. I've probably become more closed and more dependent on my close
25 friends... I remember probably, like, maybe a week into moving here, I was sat in this

1 changing room and they were all nice guys, they were joking around, and stuff. And I
2 remember just sitting there thinking it's funny, like, what they're talking about is
3 funny and stuff like that, but I was like, these aren't my real mates... I'm in the
4 position where I don't really want to see people as just colleagues because then that
5 makes things a bit lonely, but I'm also in the position where I don't really feel like I
6 have the capacity to reach out and make strong friendships yet. (Charles, Audio Diary
7 #7/#20).

8 **Unrealistically High Expectations of Self and Others**

9 When reflecting on their past experiences, some participants suggested that they
10 typically responded to daily stressors by having unrealistically high expectations of
11 themselves and others. Within the present study, several participants demonstrated some
12 perfectionistic tendencies whereby they sometimes set unrealistically high expectations of
13 themselves. The following quote highlights how the potential quest for flawlessness may lead
14 to experiencing additional stressors, and responding with increased feelings of anxiety, and
15 diminished self-esteem:

16 I had my [*work appraisal*] which is fine, standard stuff. But what sent me spiralling
17 was that I went from 'exceeding expectations' to 'meeting expectations'... Anything
18 less than perfect or exceeding or excellent just isn't good enough... My head just
19 went "you're thick as shit, what are you doing, you're not worth anything, you're not
20 good enough, you're not doing enough". And instead of that being a call to action to
21 do stuff, it was almost like my body shuts down. It is really weird. Like my body is
22 also repulsed. I don't know. It just makes me not want to do anything and all I want to
23 do is get into bed and sleep so then I can turn off all of those negative thoughts. (Lily,
24 Audio Diary #10/#19).

1 While striving for excellence can sometimes be beneficial, participants in this study
2 highlighted that having unrealistically high expectations of yourself can lead to “paralysis”.
3 This "paralysis" was described as both a mental and physical response, where participants felt
4 unable to take productive steps forward, experienced a shutdown of motivation, and, in some
5 cases, withdrew from daily activities. Some participants in the present study were also found
6 to have unrealistically high expectations of others as well. The following quote illustrates
7 how individuals with unrealistically high expectations of others can be particularly
8 unforgiving when something is not completed perfectly:

9 My ability to cope with something I am good at versus my ability to cope with other
10 people who aren't so good, there is that intolerance there... It makes me irrationally
11 angry and does make me over-scrutinise them. It can make me behave quite
12 aggressively. (Lily, Audio Diary #2/#19).

13 In addition, Charles supports this notion in the following quote whereby he demands
14 perfectionism from others consistently which can result in uncooperative and critical
15 behaviours:

16 We lost at the weekend which was frustrating, I mean, I probably saw it coming but it
17 was the kind of game where we had no response... Today the coaches have basically
18 panicked and gone into overdrive calling players out and trying to set standards. It's
19 something that should have been done in week one of pre-season, but it's a very knee
20 jerk reaction to a loss... I found it frustrating because I'd kind of seen it coming and
21 the standards when I turned up weren't up to scratch and it wasn't really a surprise
22 that this has happened. When you've seen the standards are slipping and people
23 suddenly take it really seriously and you're a bit like, hold on, you weren't doing that
24 a week ago so why have your values suddenly changed. (Charles, Audio Diary
25 #16/#20).

Overly Empathetic to Others

When reflecting on their past experiences, some participants suggested that they were often found to be overly empathetic to others. The following quote highlights how Bethany ‘absorbed’ other people’s emotions and worries which often led to a negative impact on their own mental health and well-being. This can be demonstrated by the following quote:

There were a couple of welfare-type meetings in the afternoon. One individual who has been through some very unpleasant personal situations... It always makes me feel very sad when I hear about this kind of thing... Although that was a really productive meeting, I do find it takes it out of me a little bit. I'm not very good at distancing myself from some of the stuff other people have been through... That is always quite distressing as well, and I do find these mentally hard (Bethany, Audio Diary #5/#22).

In addition, several participants noted that they regularly prioritised the feelings of others above their own needs which led to them neglecting their own health and well-being in order to care for others. This is illustrated in the following quote:

I don't mind doing these things if they're isolated incidents, but the problem I have is that in previous jobs, once it starts to get out that I will respond to emails and be helpful, suddenly you get everyone and their dog wanting a piece of you. In my old job, it got to a point where I barely got a moment's peace in my office. It was horrible. It was truly horrible... I just spent all day every day dealing with issues that should have been dealt with by other people. I just don't wanna deal with that again, so I'm trying very hard to set boundaries. And I feel quite mean, but crikey, I really hope it doesn't get that bad again. It was tiring. (Bethany, Audio Diary #19/#22).

Although it was deemed necessary to be attuned to other people’s feelings, some participants in this study suggested that being overly empathetic may lead people to ignore

1 their own needs and wants. This was typically found to disrupt an individual's behaviours
2 and increase anxiety:

3 I feel like this stress has probably lasted from the time that my parents have been
4 divorced up until now. It's something that occupies my thoughts literally all the time
5 to the point where I will probably change most of my plans to compensate for that. It
6 doesn't make me feel very good, it probably makes me behave a bit erratically and I
7 don't tend to cope with it too well I think. I then probably miss out on stuff that I'd
8 like to do because of that. I feel like I change my life quite a lot for my Mum because
9 I am worried about her. It's not necessarily that that's a negative thing but then I do
10 think about my future in terms of what happens if I'm not around or if I get a job up
11 on the other side of the country. (Lily, Audio Diary #4/#19).

12 **Hypervigilant to Future Stressors**

13 When reflecting on their past experiences, some participants suggested that they often
14 interpreted daily stressors in an elevated state whereby they were constantly assessing their
15 environment for potential threats. Several participants typically exhibited hypervigilance
16 which can be characterized by an individual continuously scanning their environment for
17 potential stressors that may arise. In doing so, this was also found to increase the likelihood
18 of catastrophic interpretations of stressors and planning for the worse-case scenario. This can
19 be showcased by the following quote:

20 I think what I do is ... I always prepare for the worst so I'm always like, "This is the
21 very worst thing that can happen and so if I'm prepared for that then I'm okay and I
22 can deal with everything else." That is something that's happened with the money
23 issues that I've been having for the past week. I've realised that if I don't get the
24 money that is the worst thing that can happen so how am I going to prepare for that? I
25 had prepared for that... I just think I always expect the worst to happen and if I can't

1 prepare for it then that stresses me out. I just can't use my usual coping mechanisms
2 to prepare for the absolute worst and so I just get really, really anxious even though I
3 know it's not really going to happen like that and it hardly ever happens. (Abbie,
4 Audio Diary #7/#21).

5 It is worth noting that the participants who were particularly alert to future stressors
6 viewed this as a positive way to deal with stressful situations. Identifying potential stressors
7 and preparing for them in advance allowed some participants to feel in control and better able
8 to cope with various daily life stressors faced:

9 One of the things that's come across is that maybe in current years, I prepare for
10 stressful situations as much as I can. It's something I've never really done when I was
11 younger. So I think having been quite badly prepared [*laughter*] throughout my
12 younger life has led to a lot of thinking on my feet and acting quite fast and reacting
13 to situations, and now I've kind of built that skillset, but coupling with being
14 somebody who's quite prepared it puts me in a good place, I think. (Gary, Audio
15 Diary #19/#21).

16 Although preparing for stressful situations was perceived as a useful way to deal with
17 stressors, it was also identified that such strategies could result in emotional exhaustion
18 whereby persistently worrying over potential situations depletes an individual's energy:

19 By the time I got home I was shattered. This is becoming a bit of a problem with
20 evening training, so there was no kickboxing training tonight so I couldn't have gone
21 if I'd wanted to... Sometimes when I've had a day like this, you come home and
22 you're just bone-tired. You don't even want to get out of the car. You'll just sit in the
23 car on the driveway for 10 minutes [*laughter*] trying to work up the energy to go
24 inside and flop on the sofa. It is that exhausting, and that is a big barrier to training
25 sometimes. (Bethany, Audio Diary #5/#22).

Discussion

It is well-established that lifetime stressor exposure increases the risk for mental (e.g., depressive symptoms; Slavich & Shields, 2018) and physical (e.g., cardiovascular disease; Slavich et al., 2019) health problems. Although important, this research has primarily used self-report questionnaires, which only assesses stressor exposure at a single point in time. This approach has been criticized given that static research strategies are unlikely to capture rich information (Lazarus, 1999). As a result, little is known about how historical exposure to stressors influences sport performers' responses to acute daily life stressors. Therefore, this study aimed to explore how historical exposure to high lifetime stress, assessed retrospectively using self-report measures, influences sport performers' interpretations of, and responses to, acute daily life stressors, which were explored prospectively using a daily diary approach. This study extends prior research by utilizing daily audio diaries to capture longitudinal data to allow for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of how sport performers' respond to daily life stressors.

Within this study, our findings highlighted that some sport performers who had experienced high lifetime stress interpreted and responded to daily stressors by fixating on irrelevant tasks. Hyperfixation was viewed as complete absorption in a task, to a point where a person appears to completely ignore everything else (Ashinoff & Abu-Akel, 2021). This allowed sport performers to disconnect from external stressors by engrossing themselves in an irrelevant activity until physical and/or mental exhaustion (Flanagan et al., 2012). Although this can be beneficial, our findings highlighted that such hyperfixation was typically maladaptive given that obsessive behaviours and intrusive ruminations often led to individuals neglecting important responsibilities (e.g., sporting commitments). This is supported by previous research which suggests that when individuals are in a state of hyperfixation they find themselves unable to mobilize effort for other tasks, even though this

1 may cause significant problems (Kahl & Wahl, 2006). While hyperfixation has been
2 researched in the context of autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Ashinoff &
3 Abu-Akel, 2021), this is the first study to illustrate the connection between high lifetime
4 stress and hyperfixation when encountering daily life stressors.

5 Our findings also highlighted that some sport performers who had experienced high
6 lifetime stress typically responded to daily stressors in a disproportionate way. Such
7 disproportionate responses can be characterized by exaggerated (e.g., heightened emotional
8 or behavioural reactions to stressors) or blunted (e.g., apathetic to stressors) responses to an
9 acute stressor (Hughes et al., 2018). This finding is consistent with recent theory and
10 empirical research which hypothesizes that individual (e.g., historical exposure to stressors)
11 and environmental (e.g., socio-economic status) factors shape how individuals habitually
12 view events and respond to stressors both psychologically and physiologically (e.g., Epel et
13 al., 2018). Extreme responses (i.e., exaggerated or blunted) have been associated with adverse
14 health outcomes (e.g., cardiovascular disease), suggesting that a normative response is more
15 optimal (Turner et al., 2021). Consequently, this finding extends previous research by
16 elucidating the emotional and behavioural components of exaggerated and blunted responses
17 from a perspective that goes beyond purely physiological aspects.

18 Our findings also highlighted that some sport performers who had experienced high
19 lifetime stress dealt with daily life stressors in an independent way, as they were overly self-
20 reliant. Within this study, this was characterized by an avoidance of asking for help, not
21 relying on others to help, and often rejecting support from close friends and family. This is
22 consistent with research outside of the sporting context whereby the notion of “survivalist
23 self-reliance” has been explored among young adults aging out of foster care (Samuels &
24 Pryce, 2008). This research suggests that there are three interrelated mechanisms noted as
25 contributing to this identity: (1) premature conferral of adult status; (2) growing up without a

parent; and (3) survivor pride in disavowing dependence (Samuels & Pryce, 2008). This aligns with our findings whereby sport performers demonstrated an avoidance of asking others for help due to the stressors experienced in childhood (e.g., absence of a parent). Although self-reliance can be adaptive, it also poses a potential risk factor in facilitating the supportive relationships that can produce positive outcomes in adulthood (Freeman, 2021). As a result, these findings advance prior research by exploring how lifetime stressor exposure may contribute to the development of self-reliance — a trait that, as previous literature suggests, can be associated with negative implications for health and well-being.

Many sport performers who had experienced high lifetime stress often responded to daily stressors by having unrealistically high expectations of themselves and others. Within the present study, some participants displayed self-orientated perfectionistic tendencies whereby they set unrealistically high expectations of themselves (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Previous research has highlighted the ambiguous relationship between self-oriented perfectionism and health, whereby some studies have shown positive associations and others revealing negative associations (e.g., Molnar et al., 2012). These mixed findings reflect self-oriented perfectionism's potential to energise behaviour, which might explain why it is sometimes positively related to performance (e.g., Madigan, 2019). Furthermore, previous research examining lifetime stressor exposure, health, and perfectionism found that self-oriented perfectionism attenuated the relationship between lifetime stressor exposure and physical health complaints (McLoughlin et al., 2024b). The adoption of qualitative research methods allowed us to capture a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of these variables. Participants also displayed other-oriented perfectionistic tendencies which is the demand of perfection from others (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). From a theoretical perspective, other-oriented perfectionism has been found to predict ill-health via stress perturbation which is the tendency for those high in other-oriented perfectionism to maintain a stressful episode

1 via the use of maladaptive coping techniques (e.g., uncooperative and critical behaviours;
2 Flett & Hewitt, 2002). Taken together, self-oriented and other-oriented perfectionism may
3 engender stressors in athletes and leave them vulnerable to psychological difficulties, such as
4 burnout and exhaustion (Olsson et al., 2022).

5 Our findings highlighted that some sport performers who had experienced high
6 lifetime stress were found to be overly empathetic to others. Specifically, sport performers'
7 seemingly 'absorbed' other people's emotions which could negatively impact their own
8 mental health and well-being. Indeed, some individuals who were overly empathetic to others
9 reported negative responses (e.g., increased anxiety) to traumatic events. This is akin to the
10 concept of emotional contagion which suggests that the emotion and affective behaviour
11 experienced by one individual may be influenced by that of others through conscious or
12 unconscious pathways (Hatfield et al., 1993). Although it is acknowledged that individuals
13 differ in their tendency to be influenced by the emotions expressed by other people, it is not
14 currently known what factors influence susceptibility to emotional contagion (Doherty,
15 1997). To our knowledge, this is the first study to highlight the importance of historical
16 exposure to stressors influencing the potential development of emotional contagion via
17 enhanced empathy.

18 The final GET highlighted that some sport performers who had experienced high
19 lifetime stress interpreted and responded to daily stressors in a hypervigilant state. Within this
20 study, hypervigilance can be characterized by an individual continuously scanning their
21 environment for potential stressors that may arise. Previous research has found that historical
22 exposure to major life stressors can predict maladaptive and distressing hypervigilance for
23 potential threat even in a safe environment (e.g., Dalgleish et al., 2001). Over time
24 hypervigilance has been found to be both distracting and exhausting given that the individual
25 is constantly alert from a physiological and psychological perspective (Yoon & Weierich,

2016). While *vigilance* may be appropriate and adaptive in many contexts, it is assumed that hypervigilance is largely dysfunctional (Kimble et al., 2013). Our finding is consistent with previous research outside of sport and confirms for the first time within the sporting context, that hypervigilance is a prominent feature in those who have been exposed to numerous and severe major life stressors. Alternatively, this GET may also be interpreted as a problem-focused coping strategy. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) highlight that problem-focused coping aims to directly manage the stressor. Within this study, participants did this by proactively identifying any future stressors which may arise. Recent research has found that problem-focused coping was perceived as helpful for increasing actual or perceived control among coaches (Kent et al., 2023).

A noteworthy strength of this research relates to the longitudinal study design employed. Advantages of this approach are that, compared to cross-sectional research designs, it offers the opportunity to capture the interplay between personal experiences and broader environmental factors, giving a richer and more holistic picture of participants' lives. Furthermore, the use of audio diaries allowed us to collect data as the participant experiences particular events or emotions (Day, 2017), and thus, minimising memory vagueness, retrospective censorship, and reframing (Didymus & Fletcher, 2012). Indeed, a key advantage of using audio diaries is the minimization of researcher influence over participants' responses (Monrouxe, 2009). This suggests that audio diaries could be useful in capturing information that might otherwise be inaccessible to researchers (e.g., sensitive and emotional topics; Monrouxe, 2009). Another strength of this research relates to the characteristics of the participants in the study. Indeed, previous research utilizing daily diaries as a data collection tool has only sampled highly competitive athletes in a single sport (see Didymus & Fletcher, 2012). This study extends previous research by sampling sport performers from multiple

1 competitive levels and various sports ensuring that the findings are relevant to all sport
2 performers in a variety of different contexts.

3 Despite these strengths, there are also some limitations. First, it should be noted that
4 diary studies tend to attract participants who are young and intelligent (e.g., Thiele et al.,
5 2002). Within this study, participants were relatively young at 30 years old and were all well-
6 educated (i.e., all participants had attained at least an undergraduate degree, with over half of
7 the participants being educated to a postgraduate level or above). Therefore, future research
8 could focus on recruiting samples that are more diverse. Additionally, the present study
9 collected limited information regarding participants sociodemographic characteristics. Future
10 research should seek to collect information on participants' sociodemographic characteristics
11 (e.g., socio-economic status, culture) to explore how these factors influence both current and
12 historical exposure to stressors. Furthermore, diaries depend on participants' ability to
13 express their thoughts and feelings accurately and in sufficient detail (Day & Thatcher,
14 2009). This can be highlighted within the present study whereby the length of the audio
15 diaries significantly ranged in length (i.e., 2 minutes 40 seconds to 28 minutes 21 seconds).
16 Future research could, therefore, give participants the option of whether they want to
17 complete audio or written dairies. While it was beyond the scope of the present study,
18 perceived daily stressor severity was not explored or controlled for, which may have
19 influenced how participants interpreted and responded to stressors. Although stressor severity
20 has been examined in research outside the sports domain (e.g., Shields et al., 2023; Vagg &
21 Spielberger, 1999), it has not been widely incorporated into sport-specific studies. Therefore,
22 research should account for such stressor dimensions in future studies. Next, although the
23 timeframe between lifetime stressor assessment (i.e., August 2023-February 2024) and the
24 daily audio diary period (March 2024-April 2024) was relatively short, participants'
25 reflections on their historical exposure to stressors may have been influenced by on-going

personal development, relational changes, or other contextual factors. This should be considered when interpreting the subjective links participants made between lifetime stressor exposure and daily stressor responses. It is also important to note that one participant within our sample disclosed a diagnosis of ADHD. We acknowledge that this may have influenced their interpretations of and responses to stress. As we did not collect formal diagnostic data across the wider sample, we are unable to determine the extent to which neurodiverse conditions may have shaped participants' stress responses and coping behaviours more broadly. Future research would benefit from more explicitly considering the role of neurodiversity in how individuals interpret and respond to stressors. Another limitation of this study is that it did not conduct idiographic comparisons of individual stress appraisals and responses to specific daily stressors. Future research should explore the full transactional stress process at the individual level to better understand how unique stressors are appraised and interpreted across diverse sport performers. Finally, the present study included participants who had experienced high lifetime stress, and so future research should include participants who have experienced differing levels of historical stressor exposure (e.g., low and moderate number of lifetime stressors) as a comparison group.

The findings of this study also have some important applied implications. First, given that responses to daily stressors may differ depending on the individual (e.g., exaggerated vs. blunted), practitioners should identify those individuals who have experienced high lifetime stress and provide tailored support to those most at-risk of developing stress-related health problems. One approach to educate sport performers on utilising more adaptive responses to acute daily life stressors is through the use of video narratives. Video narratives can be defined as an arts-based form of knowledge translation, meaning that they use short-form videos to communicate research evidence through exchange or dissemination (Archibald et al., 2021). Video narratives can be used as a novel and alternative way to implement stress

management techniques to help sport performers appraise, manage, and deal with stressors more effectively (Fletcher & Arnold, 2021). Everard et al. (2024), for example, have utilised video narratives to direct sport performers towards certain actions and away from others (e.g., sacrificing short-term gains to prioritize long-term health and well-being). Our study findings highlighted that sport performers' interpretations of, and responses to, various acute daily life stressors were beneficial in the short-term, but could subsequently create problems in the longer-term. For example, hyperfixating on certain tasks was viewed as beneficial in the short term due to its association with heightened productivity; however, it also posed risks by disrupting day-to-day functioning. Therefore, practitioners should educate sport performers around both the short and long term, and positive and negative, implications of stress responses. Third, our also findings highlighted that sport performers were often overly self-reliant, which lead to social isolation. Here, the use of video narratives may also help to foster interpersonal connections and reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness. Video narratives can be used to build resonance between those who have experienced similar situations (Everard et al., 2024). Given that participants often responded to daily life stressors with irrational thoughts and beliefs, practitioners could use Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) as an effective intervention (Turner, 2016). REBT suggests that emotional and behavioural reactions are driven not by events themselves, but by one's beliefs about those events (Turner, 2016). By challenging irrational beliefs, REBT helps individuals develop healthier emotional and behavioural responses, ultimately supporting long-term goal achievement (Turner, 2016).

Outside of sport, relaxation techniques have been found to address the manifestations of prolonged stress (e.g., numbing symptoms, hyperarousal etc; Boyd et al., 2017). Utilizing strategies such as mindfulness, deep breathing, yoga, and meditation, can enhance the ability to control stress-related symptoms, providing sport performers with the ability to respond

1 adaptively to stressors (Scotland-Coogan & Davis, 2016). Another intervention that might be
2 useful is the stress optimisation approach (Crum et al., 2020), which encourages individuals
3 to view stress responses as beneficial (e.g., increased heart rate). Indeed, research has shown
4 that fostering a stress-is-enhancing mindset and prompting reappraisal of stress-induced
5 physiological arousal can improve health and well-being (Jamieson et al., 2018). In the
6 physically demanding environment of Navy SEAL training, those with stress-is-enhancing
7 mindsets show improved performance on obstacle course times, last longer in the program,
8 and are rated more positively by peers and instructors (Smith et al., 2020). This highlights
9 that stress-is-enhancing mindset can predict objective performance over and above baseline
10 characteristics, such as education level, fitness, and optimism (Smith et al., 2020).

11 In conclusion, this study explored how historical exposure to high lifetime stress
12 influences sport performers' interpretations of, and responses to, various acute daily life
13 stressors. Findings highlight that sport performers who had experienced high lifetime stress
14 responded to daily stressors in a variety of ways, including: (1) hyperfixation; (2)
15 disproportionate responses to stressors; (3) self-reliance leading to social isolation; (4)
16 unrealistically high expectations of self and others; (5) overly empathetic to others; and (6)
17 hypervigilance to future stressors. This study extends prior research by utilizing daily audio
18 diaries to capture longitudinal data to allow for a more nuanced and comprehensive
19 understanding of how sport performers' respond to the varying stressors experienced at
20 different time points and how this may subsequently impact health, well-being, and
21 performance. Consequently, these findings can be used to help practitioners better support
22 sport performers who have experienced extensive lifetime stressors. Indeed, the use of video
23 narratives could encourage sport performers with a history of lifetime stress to utilise more
24 adaptive responses to acute daily life stressors.

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