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Perceived Stress and Burnout: Experiences of College Coaches in NCAA Division III Institutions

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The purpose of this research is to explore how gender and family dynamics, particularly parenthood, impacts stress and burnout levels among National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III coaches. Our sample reported moderate perceived stress but low overall burnout. This study analyzed 752 responses using the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (α = .945) and Perceived Stress Scale (α = .888), applying descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney U tests to identify differences. Results indicate that women coaches report significantly higher stress and burnout levels than men. Conversely, coaches with children experience lower perceived stress and personal burnout compared to those without children. These findings underscore gender disparities in stress and burnout while highlighting the potential buffering effect of parenthood. Personal life factors, particularly family dynamics, appear to play a crucial role in coaches' mental well-being. Understanding burnout among coaches is essential for fostering a healthy team environment. Sport organizations should invest in mental health support tailored to coaches' needs, incorporating family-oriented interventions to mitigate burnout. Prioritizing coaches' well-being can enhance overall team functioning and athlete development.

Key words: mental fatigue, work-related exhaustion, role overload

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In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on burnout and mental health and well-being in collegiate sports, particularly regarding the well-being of student-athletes. These athletes must balance the demands of their sport with their academic responsibilities, and underperformance in either area—combined with their numerous obligations—can contribute to mental health struggles and burnout (Brown et al., 2022). While extensive research has been conducted on managing student-athlete mental health, far less attention has been given to the mental well-being of coaches (McGuire, 2023). A recent study conducted by the NCAA highlighted the increased strain on coaches' mental health and well-being, as a third of all survey respondents reported feeling mental fatigue, due to being overwhelmed by their growing demands on the job, which have caused sleep related issues (McGuire, 2023). Work-related and financial concerns were identified as the primary factors negatively affecting coaches' mental health and well-being, particularly among millennial and younger NCAA coaches (McGuire, 2023).

Mental health issues marked by emotional or mental fatigue can be described as burnout, a syndrome that happens with prolonged stress at work or home that results in being overwhelmed, cynical, or loss of motivation (Wright et al., 2023). Understanding burnout among college coaches is important as it can have a direct impact on the quality of the relationship they have with their athletes. Moreover, although the World Health Organization (2019) classifies burnout as a workplace phenomenon, there is emerging information that burnout can manifest from personal life stress, as well as those work demands and patient/client/athlete interactions (Oglesby et al., 2020; Olusoga et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2023). Although unrealistic work demands are large contributors to burnout, individual factors (i.e., gender, work addiction) can influence experiences as well for coaches and others working in sport (Oglesby et al., 2020; Olusoga et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2023). Specifically, women and those who have a strong identity to the work (work addicted) can experience greater levels of burnout (Oglesby et al., 2020; Olusoga et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2019). Parenthood also can confound experiences of burnout; as work-family conflict has been reported as a prime catalyst for burnout (Oglesby et al., 2020).

Literature Review

Stress in Coaching

Coaching is increasingly recognized as a high-stress profession. Coaches face long working hours, job insecurity, and the emotional demands of player development and team dynamics; all that may contribute to chronic stress (Olusoga et al., 2021). Moreover, working in sport has been associated with challenges around work-life balance, exacerbated by the organizational expectations associated with the roles and responsibilities of those working in sport (Graham & Smith, 2022). Coaches at any level face a variety of stressors including work-related (e.g., competition preparation, conflicts with athletes), performance (e.g., winning, success of the program)

and personal (e.g., missed family time; Olusoga et al., 2010, 2019; Schaffran et al., 2016). Evidence indicates that employment within collegiate sport is highly challenging and demanding, as coaches are required to manage numerous stressors that often persist over extended periods of time (Raedeke, 2004). These stressors include long work hours, recruiting pressures, performance expectations, and administrative responsibilities, which collectively increase the risk of burnout. Raedeke's work contributes to the field by highlighting how chronic occupational demands in coaching impact well-being and underscoring the need for organizational and individual strategies to support coaches' mental health.

Experiences of stress can stem from a variety of sources, including organizational demands (e.g., long working hours, high job expectations), personal life circumstances (e.g., family responsibilities), and individual characteristics (e.g., gender, perfectionism; Tashman et al., 2010). Perceived stress is commonly defined as the subjective appraisal of these stressors and one's perceived ability to manage them effectively (Cohen et al., 1983). Smith's (1986) cognitive-affective model of stress in sport and coaching provides a useful framework for understanding this process. The model conceptualizes stress as a dynamic transaction between the individual and their environment, emphasizing the role of cognitive appraisal and coping resources (Smith, 1986). According to this model, when individuals perceive environmental demands as exceeding their coping abilities, and appraise the situation as threatening or uncontrollable, they are more likely to experience negative psychological and physiological outcomes (Smith, 1986). This perspective aligns with findings that individuals who perceive their stressors as unpredictable or unmanageable are at greater risk for compromised mental and physical well-being.

Perceived stress has been linked previously among coaches (Olusoga et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2023). As the season continues and job-related stress accumulates, coaches are likely to experience a tool on their mental health and well-being, or even burnout (Raedeke, 2004). Coaches may experience similar pressures and challenges with their mental health and well-being as their athletes (Pilkington et al., 2022). The NCAA Division I setting is often the central focus of these discussions around stress and working in sport, as the culture is described as non-stop with underlying expectations of working long hours (e.g., ≥40 per week), being physically present or available 24/7, along with travel that does not end with the season (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Dabbs et al., 2016; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Huml et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2019). While all three NCAA divisions have stressful time demands and work commitments, the Division I setting has more prominent stressors including the transfer portal, the heightened expectations of winning, and a growing influence on Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) deals; this has added new layers of responsibility for collegiate coaches (Friedman & Steinfeldt, 2024). These additional pressures can increase workplace stress and perceived stress—both of which are linked to burnout (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Huml et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2023).

Burnout in Coaching

Burnout is a psychological syndrome that develops in response to chronic stress, particularly when the perceived demands consistently outweigh coping resources. Freudenberger (1980) defined burnout as "a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by a devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward" (Freudenberger, 1980). According to Smith's (1986) Cognitive-Affective Model, burnout unfolds through a four-stage process. In the first stage (*situational demands*), a coach may be juggling intense competition schedules, administrative duties, and family responsibilities, such as caring for young children or aging parents (Smith, 1986). In the second stage (*cognitive appraisal)*, the coach begins to perceive these overlapping demands as unmanageable, questioning their ability to meet expectations both professionally and personally (Smith, 1986). This leads to the third stage (*physiological response*), where chronic stress manifests as fatigue (Smith, 1986). Finally, in the fourth stage (*behavioral responses*), the coach may begin to withdraw emotionally from their team, reduce efforts, or feel detached from their role, ultimately leading to burnout (Smith, 1986).

Although definitions have evolved over time, they consistently emphasize burnout as a state of emotional, physical, and mental fatigue (Demerouti, 2024; Khammissa et al., 2022; WHO, 2019). Individuals working in high demand jobs such as coaches, athletic trainers, and other stakeholders in sport are susceptible to burnout (Singe et al., 2025). Coaching is a high-pressure profession that requires deep emotional investment, like the athletes they mentor. The constant pressure to achieve results can take a toll, and while many coaches are driven by the pursuit of excellence (Knights & Ruddock-Hudson, 2016), failure to meet expectations can be detrimental to their mental health, as burnout is likely.

Organizational Stressors and Burnout

Burnout has been previously recognized as a byproduct of work-related stress; however, burnout is believed to be caused by multiple sources including personal factors, interactions with athletes, and work demands (Kristensen et al., 2005). Workplace stress within sport can be categorized into three primary areas: the conditions of the workplace, the expectations placed on individuals, and the overall workload. When these stressors are prolonged or exceed one's coping resources, they can contribute directly to burnout by fostering emotional exhaustion, reduced sense of accomplishment, and depersonalization (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Raedeke, 2004). Coaches are expected to win and make sacrifices to achieve success, expectations that create the plausibility of workaholism, a leading factor in burnout among coaches (Taylor et al., 2019). Furthermore, long hours (e.g., practice, recruiting, competitions), travel, and the ever-changing landscape of college athletics provide a foundation for burnout to occur. Working with athletes can also lead to burnout, as once described as a syndrome that manifests by the strain of caring for others. Coaches are leaders of their team who are inherently meant to guide, support, and encourage their team to achieve their goals (Freudenberger, 1980).

Personal Stressors and Burnout

Personal life stress can arise from family and spousal relationships, household responsibilities, and challenges in finding time for personal hobbies, exercise, or self-care. These personal demands often interact with professional responsibilities, creating work-family conflict; a situation in which the demands of work and family roles are mutually incompatible. In athletic training, WFC has been identified as a key predictor of burnout, contributing to emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment, and decreased job satisfaction (Graham & Dixon, 2017; Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Dabbs et al., 2016). Prior research highlights that irregular schedules, long work hours, and performance pressures intensify this conflict, demonstrating how personal and professional spheres intersect to affect coaches' well-being (Taylor et al., 2019).

Women in sport and athletic training often navigate complex demands that contribute to elevated stress and burnout. Despite working fewer hours than their male counterparts, they report higher levels of burnout—driven not only by professional pressures but also by societal expectations to excel in both career and caregiving roles (Mazerolle & Eason, 2015; Rynkiewicz et al., 2022). This "superwoman" ideal places women in a constant state of striving, where success in one domain can feel like failure in another (Mazerolle & Eason, 2015). Many report experiencing guilt—whether for missing family time due to work obligations or for stepping back professionally to prioritize home responsibilities (Rynkiewicz et al., 2022). These emotional burdens, compounded by role overload, highlight the need to examine how gender and family status intersect to influence well-being in athletic training professions.

In addition to personal stressors, professional demands within athletic training—including workload, administrative responsibilities, and performance expectations—also contribute to burnout. These workplace stressors can compound personal stress, leading to cumulative fatigue and emotional strain (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Raedeke, 2004). Understanding both personal and organizational contributors provides a comprehensive view of burnout in the field, clarifying what the existing literature reveals and identifying gaps that the current study aims to address.

The NCAA Division III setting currently has 429 programs making it the largest of the three NCAA subdivisions. Unlike the other two divisions, NCAA Division III institutions do not have scholarships to offer their athletes and may have smaller athletic budgets. The context in which athletics programs are delivered within the NCAA Division III setting could lead to unique stressors for coaches but has yet to be explored in the literature. Coaches in the NCAA Division III setting develop their programs without athletic scholarships and smaller budgets as compared to those in the NCAA Division I and II settings. The recent NCAA survey suggests that although coaches within the NCAA Division III report stress, it appears to be less than those in NCAA Division I (McGuire, 2023). Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that low to moderate stress levels have been reported in college coaches and that burnout can occur due to perceived stress from one's work and personal life

(Wright et al., 2023). The purpose of this study was twofold: (1) to explore perceived stress among NCAA Division III coaches using the perceived stress model, and (2) to investigate the experiences of burnout within the same population. In particular, the current study examined various demographic variables on perceived stress and burnout including gender and family status. There is enough evidence to suggest that stress and burnout are high in athletics, but little research has focused specifically on the NCAA Division III setting.

It was hypothesized that NCAA Division III coaches will experience moderate levels of total perceived stress (H1) and burnout (H2). It was hypothesized that NCAA Division III women coaches will experience higher levels of perceived stress (H3) and total burnout (H4) compared to men coaches. It was hypothesized that NCAA Division III coaches who have children will report higher levels of perceived stress (H5) and personal burnout (H6) compared to those who do not have children.

Method

Research Design

An online cross-sectional survey (Qualtrics, Provo UT) was used to collect data on coaches' perceived stress and burnout while working full time in the NCAA Division III setting. Institutional review board approval was secured prior to data collection. Both scales used in data collection have been reported as valid and reliable instruments to collect data on perceived stress (Cohen et al., 1983; Kotwas et al., 2017) and burnout (Kristensen et al., 2005; Snarr & Beasley, 2022). The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) has been used within the coaching population previously (Knight et al., 2013). The CBI has been used within sport previously among sport performance coaches (Snarr & Beasley, 2022) and athletic trainers (Singe et al., 2025; Singe et al., 2023), but not yet with coaches in the NCAA setting.

Participants, Recruitment and Exclusion Criteria

To participate in this study, participants were full-time coaches working in the NCAA Division III level. This excludes any volunteer, part-time, or graduate assistant coaches. A research team accessed the 429 institutions' websites sponsoring NCAA Division III athletics programs. A database of coaches' email addresses was created for recruitment purposes. An email was sent out to all the coaches listed in January 2025. Following the initial invitation, a reminder email was sent three weeks later. Emails of the Division III coaches were obtained through publicly available information on school websites. From there, data were collected based on how many coaches accessed the email and completed the survey. Prior to completing the survey, participants were given an informational sheet to orientate them about the study's purpose, what to expect within the survey, and consent.

Procedures

Quantitative analysis through a cross-sectional survey was utilized. Coaches at the Division III level responded to a survey administered through the Qualtrics

platform. The survey was anticipated to take 15-20 minutes to complete and contained questions that have been previously reviewed by three experts on work-life balance for clarity and content as they relate to the aims of the study. Prior to the survey, participants were informed that they may withdraw from the study at any point. Furthermore, participants were informed that there were no identifying markers to be collected, and the responses were completely anonymous and could not be connected to the participants in any way. Three screening questions were asked at the start of the survey to confirm eligibility. These screening questions confirmed that they work full-time in the NCAA Division III setting, the title of the coaching position they hold, and confirmed the level of sport they coach. If the participants answered "no" or "other" to any of these questions they were directed to the end of the survey and excluded from the study. For those that were eligible, they were able to begin the survey. The survey began with demographic questions asking about age, gender, number of children, marital status, and employment status. This information was used to separate the participants into groups for analysis. The final part of the survey included two validated scales that have been previously used in studies including the coaching population (Moen et al., 2024; Santi et al., 2021; Snarr & Beasley, 2022).

Instrumentation

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is a reliable ($\alpha = 0.85$), 10-item scale that measures the amount of stress an individual is perceiving (Cohen et al., 1983) using a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from never to very often). Results of the scale were analyzed as instructed in the validation of the scale, where a score between 0 to 13 is considered low, 14 to 26 is moderate, and 27 to 40 would indicate high stress (Cohen et al., 1983).

The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) is a reliable ($\alpha = 0.86$), 19-item scale that was used to identify the level of overall burnout that the coach is experiencing, as well as personal, work, and client-based burnout (Kristensen et al., 2005). The first six questions assess personal burnout, which reflects one's overall fatigue from life, the next seven questions are burnout from work experiences, and the final six questions evaluate burnout from working with clients (Kristensen et al., 2005). The wording in the CBI was modified to fit the coaching profession as the word "clients" was changed to "athletes". Each individual component of the scale can be summed to determine the source of burnout for each participant as well as the overall burnout score. The 5-point Likert scale is rated from 0 (never/almost never), 25 (seldom), 50 (sometimes), 75 (often), and 100 (always), with a higher score indicating a higher level of burnout. Scores below 50 are considered low, 50 to 74 is moderate, 75 to 99 is high, and 100 indicates severe burnout.

Data Analysis

Data from the survey responses were exported from Qualtrics into Excel (Microsoft Corporation). The data were cleaned and filtered through, and responses were excluded if critical responses were incomplete, questions were left unanswered, or the entirety of the scales were incomplete per scale instructions. The responses that

remained were analyzed using SPSS (version 30.0; IBM Corporation). Descriptive statistics were performed to calculate means for demographic information. Mann-Whitney U tests were used to examine differences between men and women coaches within the CBI and PSS scales, as well as to compare those with and without children among the two scales. In all cases $p < 0.05$ was established as the level of statistical significance.

Results

A total of 16,483 emails were sent in January 2025. 1,279 subjects began the survey (7.7% response rate), and 1,228 surveys were completed (96% completion rate). After reviewing the responses and removing those that were not eligible or did not complete the entirety of the scales per scale instructions, 752 responses remained and were analyzed further. The Cronbach α was calculated for the PSS and CBI to determine the internal consistency within our population and yielded a value of 0.888 for PSS and a value of 0.945 for CBI.

Participant Demographics

On average, the participants' age was 41 ± 12 years and at the time of completing the survey, had 16 ± 11 years of experience coaching and were working an average of 50 ± 15 hours per week. See Table 1 for participant demographics.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Demographic Variable	*n*	%
Gender		
Men	462	61.6%
Women	285	38.0%
Other	3	0.4%
Not Reported	2	
Marital Status		
Married	459	61.0%
Single	198	26.3%
Cohabitating	48	6.4%
Divorced	18	2.4%
Other (Separated, Widowed, Dating, etc.)	29	4.0%
Have Children		
Yes	395	52.7%
No	355	47.3%
Not Reported	2	

Note. Percentages are based on a total sample size of 752 coaches. Some participants chose not to report gender or parental status.

Perceived Stress and Burnout

Participants reported moderate levels of perceived stress on the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; $M = 17.4$, $SD = 6.4$), supporting Hypothesis 1. Table 2 presents the distribution of perceived stress severity across the sample. Total burnout scores on the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) were low ($M = 44.7$, $SD = 18.4$), leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 2. Subscale analyses revealed moderate levels of personal burnout ($M = 54.0$, $SD = 19.2$), low work-related burnout ($M = 47.2$, $SD = 21.2$), and low athlete-related burnout ($M = 32.5$, $SD = 21.6$). Table 3 provides a detailed breakdown of burnout severity.

Table 2
Severity of Perceived Stress among Collegiate Coaches

Category	*n* (%)
Low	212 (28.3)
Moderate	477 (63.7)
High	60 (8.0)

Table 3
Severity of Burnout among Collegiate Coaches

Category	*n* (%)
Low	450 (59.8)
Moderate	255 (33.9)
High	47 (6.3)
Severe	0 (0)

Gender, Perceived Stress, and Burnout

Women coaches reported significantly higher levels of perceived stress and total burnout compared to men coaches, supporting Hypotheses 3 and 4. Specifically, women reported a mean Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) score of 18.4 (SD = 5.9), while men reported a mean score of 16.8 (SD = 6.7). A Mann–Whitney U test indicated that this difference was statistically significant, $U = 55{,}910.5$, $p < .001$. For total burnout, women coaches reported a mean score of 49.8 (SD = 17.4), whereas men coaches reported a mean of 41.5 (SD = 18.3). This difference was also statistically significant, $U = 48{,}847.5$, $p < .001$. Table 4 presents Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) scores and standard deviations by gender and overall.

Table 4
CBI Scale and Subscale Means by Gender

Scale and Subscales	Men Mean (± SD)	Women Mean (± SD)	Overall Mean (± SD)
Total Burnout Inventory**	41.5 ± 18.3	49.8 ± 17.4	44.7 ± 18.4
Personal-related burnout**	50.4 ± 19.4	59.5 ± 17.6	54.0 ± 19.2
Work-related burnout**	44.1 ± 21.4	52.0 ± 20.2	47.2 ± 21.2
Athlete-related burnout**	29.4 ± 21.2	37.5 ± 21.2	32.5 + 21.6

Note. CBI – Copenhagen Burnout Inventory.
***p<0.001*

Parental Status, Perceived Stress and Burnout

Coaches with children (n = 393) reported significantly lower levels of perceived stress (p = .004) and personal burnout (p = .013) compared to coaches without children (n = 354), which did not support Hypotheses 5 and 6. Coaches with children reported a mean Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) score of 16.4 (± 6.5), whereas coaches without children reported a score of 18.2 (± 6.2). A Mann–Whitney U test revealed this difference was statistically significant, U = 61,053.5, p = .004. For personal burnout, coaches with children reported a mean score of 52.3 (± 18.9), while those without children reported a score of 55.7 (± 19.5). This is also a significant difference as indicated by a Mann–Whitney U test, U = 62,746.0, p = .013. Table 5 presents the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) means and standard deviations for coaches with and without children, as well as overall.

Table 5
CBI Scale and Subscale Means by Familial Status

Scale and Subscales	Yes Children Mean (± SD)	No Children Mean (± SD)	Overall Mean (± SD)
Total Burnout Inventory*	43.1 ± 18.3	46.8 ± 18.3	44.7 ± 18.4
Personal-related burnout*	52.3 ± 18.9	55.7 ± 19.5	54.0 ± 19.2
Work-related burnout*	44.8 ± 21.2	49.9 ± 21.0	47.2 ± 21.2
Athlete-related burnout	31.9 ± 21.7	33.3 ± 21.5	32.5 + 21.6

Note. CBI – Copenhagen Burnout Inventory.
**p<0.05*

Discussion

Sport organizations have their own unique set of work demands and stressors, making it challenging at times which can lead to burnout (Huml et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2019). There is evidence that coaches and others who work in sport demonstrate tendencies for workaholism, experience work-family conflict, and burnout. Occupational and life stress may contribute to these experiences. Within

the coaching literature, there is a heavy focus on the NCAA Division I setting and little on the NCAA Division III setting. The unexpected finding, that coaches with children report lower stress and personal burnout, contradicts common assumptions that parenthood increases strain due to added responsibilities, time demands, and emotional pressures. Instead, this aligns with the demands–rewards perspective, which suggests that parenthood can provide meaning, fulfillment, and protective effects that buffer against stress and burnout (Ren et al., 2024).

Coaching and Stress

The landscape of coaching is one that places high demands on coaches, which can lead to a perception of high occupational stress. We predicted that NCAA Division III coaches would experience moderate levels of stress due to the time demands, recruiting and retention demands, pressures to win, and job security (Knight et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2023). Within our sample, we found that 64% of the coaches reported moderate levels of stress. This confirmed our initial hypothesis and aligned with the vast literature (Tashman et al., 2010) on coaching, that coaching is a stressful profession (Knight et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2023).

Literature may not always discuss how the level (i.e., Division I vs Division III) can influence occupational stressors, but often each level within the NCAA setting can bring different stressors. Our study's design did not collect insights on the work and personal stressors for our coaches, perceived stressors in the NCAA DIII setting could be lack of athletic scholarships, coaching hours, and travel. Hours worked are another factor contributing to perceived stress, with this sample reporting an average of 55 or more hours per week at the time of the survey. Such extended work hours can be stressful, even when coaches enjoy their jobs, as they reduce the time available for personal activities, hobbies, and household responsibilities. Coaching in sport often demands significant dedication and long hours, and prior research has consistently shown that most coaches work well beyond a standard 40-hour workweek (Huml et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2019).

Salaries of NCAA Division III coaches are much lower than those of NCAA Division I and II coaches (NFHCA, 2022). Financial strain can lead to increased perceived stress, particularly for those who view themselves as the breadwinner of their families. Our sample was comprised largely (62%) of men coaches which could give merit to this theory. Additionally, for this sample personal burnout was the highest subscale with our sample reporting moderate levels of personal burnout compared to low for work and athlete-based burnout.

Coaching and Burnout

Burnout does not occur overnight, but rather it is a process of prolonged stress that goes unmanaged. We predicted, initially, that burnout would also be moderate for this group of college coaches. However, we found that the overall score was classified as low. In fact, 60% of the sample was categorized as low, compared to 34% with moderate burnout. Of note, this is an interesting finding as our sample had moderate levels of perceived stress, a known predictor of burnout (Singe et al., 2025).

Because burnout is considered a process rather than a singular event, the perceived stress measured in our sample may represent only a transitory stage. Historically, burnout was viewed strictly as an occupational hazard; however, emerging literature suggests that personal factors also contribute to its development. For example, consistent with recent work in athletic training (Singe, Mydosh, Cairns, & Eason, 2023; Singe, Cairns, & Eason, 2025), our results showed that personal burnout was the highest subscale, followed by work and then athlete burnout. Notably, the personal burnout score in our sample was classified as moderate (see Tables 3 and 4). This finding is important because it reinforces the evolving perspective that personal life stressors play a central role in the burnout process, not just occupational demands. By highlighting the prominence of personal burnout among coaches, this study expands existing knowledge by demonstrating how stressors outside the workplace may interact with professional responsibilities, offering a more comprehensive view of the factors contributing to burnout in sport.

Previous studies have found that there are many factors contributing to burnout in coaches such as ruminating over their performance, working too many hours, lack of control of results, scrutiny from the media, and more. (Hassmén et al., 2019, 2020; Kilo & Hassmén, 2016). Workplace fit could also explain why work and athlete burnout were lower compared to personal burnout. Findings from our study align with Sas-Nowosielski et al.'s findings that sports coaches are not emotionally exhausted despite the number of stressors they may be experiencing (Sas-Nowosielski et al., 2018). This could be because they have strong support systems, may find enjoyment in their jobs as coaches, and find passion in their work. A coach's passion for their job increases their job satisfaction (Gilbert, 2012), and may even cause coaches to work more hours than they are paid for (Hassmén et al., 2019). Passion, along with coping strategies, may play an important role in protecting coaches from burning out in their high stress jobs.

Gender, Stress and Burnout

Women coaches experience higher levels of stress and burnout compared to men often due to role conflict, workload incongruence, and the tendencies for emotional-based coping compared to problem-based coping (Bentzen et al., 2016; Caccese & Mayerberg, 1984; Fletcher & Scott, 2010). Both hypotheses were confirmed within our sample—women coaches in the NCAA Division III setting report higher levels of stress and burnout compared to men coaches. Women in general often have lower tolerance to stress, often feeling the burden of life, family, and work stress compared to men (Knight et al., 2013). Additionally, biologically speaking, women tend to feel their stressors and view stress as a threat (Matud, 2004); a perception that naturally leads to higher levels of perceived stress.

Our sample demonstrated that women coaches reported higher levels of burnout compared to the men. This was expected as the literature has found that women are more prone to burnout within the collegiate setting, regardless of role (Lopez et al., 2020) in sport (i.e., coach, athletic trainer) (Singe et al., 2025; Taylor et al., 2019). Coaching can be all consuming with demands extending well beyond the competitive season, which can increase the demands placed on the coach. Working

55 hours or more, as reported by our sample, limits time to complete personal tasks, responsibilities, and obligations. Balancing work and home responsibilities have been linked to burnout, and for women they often take on many roles at home—which could explain why they report moderate levels of personal and work-related burnout (Mazerolle & Eason, 2015). Furthermore, women in sport have been found to report higher levels of stress and burnout despite working less hours, as they feel the pressures to be superwomen exceling at home and work (Mazerolle & Eason, 2015; Rynkiewicz et al., 2022).

Family and Burnout

Coaching is demanding and requires significant time and energy, including travel, practices, and games which limit time with family, and conflict with family commitments such as childcare, school events, and leisure time. With this in mind, we assumed that our sample of coaches who were balancing parenthood as well would report higher levels of stress and burnout. Parenting is an ongoing stressor which is why we predicted both to be moderate for our sample (Ren et al., 2024). We did, however, find the opposite of our hypothesis. Our results suggest that having children may serve as a protective factor against perceived stress and burnout instead of an additional burden adding to them. Although personal burnout was found to be moderate, those who had children reported lower levels compared to those without children.

This aligns with the findings of Knights and Ruddock-Hudson, who found that coaches' families can serve as a source of support (Knights & Ruddock-Hudson, 2016). Parenthood can create resilience for a person, a key stress management and coping strategy (Michael et al., 2024). Using work-life enrichment theory (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), when a person assumes one role, they gain strength or skills in another. So, perhaps those coaches who have children have developed time management skills, structure with their days for efficiency, and have built their support networks. Parenthood can act as a buffer against burnout by providing purpose, emotional connection, and a sense of fulfillment—factors that can counterbalance the draining effects of work-related stress.

Implications for Sport

For coaches and athletic administrators, these findings emphasize the importance of prioritizing mental health support, not only for athletes, but for coaches as well. Woman coaches may be at a greater risk for stress and burnout and could benefit from resources such as access to counseling services, or more flexible schedules. Additionally, the finding that coaches with children reported lower stress and burnout suggests that encouraging work-life balance and making policies family friendly might enhance coach well-being. Athletic departments should consider integrating mental health resources that support all members of a coaching staff to create a healthier work environment, improve job satisfaction, and to contribute to improved team performance and retention of coaches. Investing in the mental health and well-being of coaches should be a necessity for sustainable success in sport.

Limitations and Future Research

A limitation of this study, and one that has been present in most coach burnout studies, is that many of these studies are cross-sectional survey designs. There is a lack of longitudinal studies that may help us understand burnout in coaches and how it affects them over the course of the season and offseason. Since the study relies on self-reported data through surveys, there is also a possibility of response bias within the data, as coaches may under or overreport their levels of stress and burnout. Additionally, the time of year that the survey was sent out (January 2025) might have altered the responses from coaches in terms of burnout, perceived stress, and hours worked per week as it was the holiday season/winter break. There are several areas that future research should touch upon. The impact of burnout on coaches both in and out of the work environment should be explored to examine the impact the burnout might have on their athletes or family. Prevention and treatment of burnout should also be further researched, as aiming to mitigate the effects of burnout may be crucial for some coaches.

Conclusion

This study provides important insights into perceived stress and reported burnout experienced by NCAA Division III coaches. The findings did not support the hypotheses that coaches with children experience higher levels of stress and burnout. This suggests that having children may serve as a protective factor against burnout and perceived stress. The results did confirm the hypotheses that women coaches experience higher levels of perceived stress and burnout. These results add to the understanding of coach mental health and well-being, though the cross-sectional design limits the ability to track mental health over the course of a season or even a career for a coach. Future research should aim to explore longitudinal studies, examine the impact that coach burnout has on others around them, and explore ways to prevent or treat burnout in coaches. The findings from this study highlight the importance of addressing mental health in all aspects of sports, including athletes, coaches, and other staff members.

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