

Running Head: SWIMMER WELLBEING INTERVENTION

**Investigating ‘What Works’ in an Online Wellbeing Intervention for Competitive
and High-Performance Swimmers**

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to design, implement, and evaluate the delivery and utility of a multi-component online intervention that aimed to protect and promote the wellbeing of competitive and high-performance swimmers. Utilising an action research methodology, the current study evaluated the delivery and utility of an intervention comprising six online workshops that were tailored to the needs of high-performance swimmers (n attending = 46). In addition, an accompanying workshop for parents (n attending = 22) and for coaches (n attending = 17) was also developed and delivered. Data were analysed using a reflexive thematic analysis approach. Overall, feedback on the intervention was positive, with participants indicating that they enjoyed the sessions, particularly opportunities for discussion and reflection, as well as learning from the experiences of a professional swimmer. Participants also indicated that their understanding and knowledge regarding wellbeing increased, as well as gaining reassurance and confidence regarding the support and strategies they had available. Nevertheless, there were some challenges and limitations identified with the workshops, which should be considered for future research and interventions.

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On top of the demands of everyday life, athletes experience a range of additional competitive, organisational, and personal stressors related to their sport that have the potential to negatively affect their wellbeing and mental health (Arnold & Fletcher, 2012; Rice et al., 2016). However, the win-at-all-costs culture that dominates many elite sports means that athlete wellbeing is often deprioritised in favour of a focus on performance (Mountjoy, 2019). Yet, wellbeing and performance are not mutually exclusive. Elite athletes themselves argue that sustained wellbeing and sustained performance go together in their sporting contexts (Brown et al., 2018). Thus, improving wellbeing may facilitate the achievement of performance goals, while improving elite athlete’s sporting experiences.

Defining Wellbeing

Wellbeing has historically been considered to have two main traditions: hedonic (e.g., emotional) and eudaimonic (e.g., psychological) (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The hedonic tradition of wellbeing is rooted in the notion that the pursuit of happiness, other positive emotions, or life satisfaction represent the pursuit of wellbeing, and to be well is to experience any of those states or emotions. The eudaimonic tradition instead argues that it is the fulfilment of one’s purpose that represents wellbeing, which may be at odds with the experiences of positive emotions (Ryan & Deci, 2001). A more recent perspective of wellbeing was proposed in recognition that the hedonic and eudaimonic traditions may not independently fully capture wellbeing, but rather represent related dimensions of a singular construct. Thus, researchers have argued for a third tradition of wellbeing that captures hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing as distinct dimensions of subjective wellbeing (Keyes, 2002). We adopted a subjective wellbeing approach in the current study, particularly recognising that

wellbeing is an individual experience and influenced by individual's goals and values (Blind for Review).

Closely interlinked with wellbeing is the concept of mental health. According to the dual continua perspective of mental health (Keyes, 2002), mental health represents both the presence and absence of mental illness and the presence and absence of subjective wellbeing on two related but independent continua. We therefore use the term mental health when we are referring to a combination of mental illness and wellbeing or to reflect terminology used in prominent examples (e.g., mental health struggles may be used to refer to someone dealing with symptoms of low wellbeing and high mental illness symptoms; or may reflect media representation of events), and reserve the use of wellbeing for reference to subjective wellbeing (i.e., combined hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing) in the present study.

Mental Health and Wellbeing in Sport

An increasing number of elite athletes are speaking out about their struggles with mental health. For example, Olympic gold medallists Ian Thorpe and Michael Phelps have both publicly spoken about their experiences of depression while swimming. More recently, tennis player Naomi Osaka withdrew from the French Open after facing financial penalties for choosing not to speak to the media to protect her mental health. Such high-profile cases have brought the topic of athlete mental health to the fore and expert position statements have called for the development of targeted athlete mental health interventions that intervene at multiple levels of influence including with peers, coaches and parents (see Vella et al., 2021, for a review of position statements).

Aligned with these calls, numerous athlete wellbeing and mental health interventions have been developed and evaluated within the extant sport psychology literature (see Breslin et al., 2017; Vella, 2019 for review). Most of these interventions target mental health literacy and awareness (e.g., Breslin et al., 2019; Vella et al., 2018), reducing symptom severity of

mental illness (e.g., Dowell et al., 2021), or teaching strategies for stress management (e.g., Fogaca, 2019). However, these interventions report varying levels of impact on their targeted outcome (i.e., athlete mental health literacy, mental illness, and wellbeing). For example, interventions aimed at improving mental health literacy generally appear positive in improving participants' mental health literacy but the longitudinal impact on participants' mental health is less clear, whereas interventions aimed at reducing depressive symptoms have not been shown to be effective (Sutcliffe et al., 2019).

One reason for this may be the tendency for interventions to target areas related to athlete mental health and wellbeing in isolation, without considering mechanisms through which symptoms of mental illness can be reduced, and symptoms of wellbeing increased (Eklund et al., 2023). Thus, when designing interventions, it is essential to keep in mind that athlete wellbeing is complex, with multiple interacting factors (i.e., identity, sport socialization, performance environment, coping strategies, transitions through career stages) that determine how it is influenced (Blind for Review). As such, it is likely that interventions will need to be multi-component and target different determinants of wellbeing to be most effective (Eklund et al., 2023; Peterson et al., 2024; van Agteren et al., 2021). Further, it has been suggested that there is a need to develop interventions that are targeted specifically at one sport, so that the context of that sport can be explicitly considered, and delivered in ways that are accessible to other practitioners to reduce the research-to-practice gap in sport psychology (Breslin et al., 2019; Ely et al., 2021).

The Present Study

Swimming was chosen due to the demanding nature of the sport, as youth and adult athletes competing at high levels (e.g., national and international) are presented with a variety of challenges that have the potential to impact negatively on wellbeing and mental health (e.g., Lang et al., 2015). For instance, competitive swimming involves intense, frequent

training sessions and long seasons (Lang, 2015), that may contribute to athlete burnout, sport dropout, and depressive episodes (e.g., Gustafsson et al., 2017; Hammond et al., 2013). In relation to swimmer wellbeing, the findings from two previous studies by [Blind for Review] have highlighted that the people around the swimmer (e.g., coaches, parents) play an important role in recognising and supporting swimmer wellbeing, although they may lack confidence in their abilities. This is not a unique issue, as many parents and coaches feel ill-equipped to adequately support athletes' wellbeing in sport without intervention (e.g., Ferguson et al., 2019; Hurley et al., 2020). As such, working directly with these individuals as well as swimmers seems pertinent to deliver interventions that adequately support athlete wellbeing (cf. Davis et al., 2019).

Furthermore, online delivery is increasingly popular in sport and exercise psychology interventions since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and arguably earlier (Meijin et al., 2022). However, there is a dearth of adequate reporting on intervention design and the elements of an impactful-yet-practical intervention are not clearly understood in online formats (Eklund et al., 2023; Ely et al., 2021). Particularly, there is little understanding as to what participants prefer in online sport psychology intervention formats. To this end, the purpose of the present study was to design, implement, and evaluate the delivery and utility of a multi-component online intervention that aimed to protect and promote the wellbeing of competitive and high-performance swimmers (aged 13-20 years). That is, given the evidence for positive changes in wellbeing through sport-based intervention (e.g., Mansfield et al., 2018; Peterson et al., 2024; Sutcliffe et al., 2021) and multicomponent positive psychology interventions more broadly (i.e., van Agteren et al., 2021), our goal was to investigate if the structure of the intervention, rather than the content per se, was perceived positively, with the intent to provide guidance for those looking to deliver online wellbeing interventions in sport. This is in line with calls from the general psychology literature in which researchers have

recommended against further intervention trials to see if the intervention works, and instead have called for a focus on understanding what about the intervention works for participants, and why (van Agteren et al., 2021).

Method

Methodology and Philosophical Underpinnings

The present study used an Action Research (AR) methodology (e.g., McNiff, 2013; 2017). AR is the process of using collaborative working to create change to address meaningful substantive issues. It involves the use of systematic enquiry to introduce and evaluate change, whilst also generating new knowledge in relation to that change (Koshy et al., 2011). Thus, as the study aimed to create change (via the development and implementation of a wellbeing intervention) whilst also producing knowledge about that change (via the evaluation of the intervention), AR was considered an appropriate methodology to achieve this aim.

AR blurs the boundaries between the ‘knower’ and the ‘known’, theory and practice, and is concerned with working collaboratively to understand, change, and shape the reality of those involved (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). More specifically, McNiff’s (2013) approach to doing AR involves recognising that participants are sharing their realities even when in conflict with that of the researcher (i.e., ontological relativism) and recognising that knowledge evolves and changes based on an individual’s experiences (i.e., epistemic subjectivism). As such, McNiff’s approach to AR complimented the interpretive paradigmatic beliefs held by the research team, specifically that reality is subjective and multiple, with people creating their own knowledge that cannot be separated from their personal values, goals, and interpretations.

Procedure

Following an AR process (see Figure 1), prior to initiating the intervention, the lead researcher had been embedded within a high-performance swimming organisation for 27 months. Specifically, the lead researcher had been tasked to investigate wellbeing by a National Governing Body (NGB) for swimming, and spent over 600 hours interviewing athletes and coaches; and observing training, team meetings, coach development sessions, coach meetings, and competitions to better understand conceptualisations of wellbeing among high-performance swimmers (i.e., Blind for Review) and develop a theory of how high-performance swimming involvement influenced swimmers' wellbeing (i.e., Blind for Review). These publications and observations served as an extended observation phase which informed initial planning (e.g., McNiff, 2017). Based on this work, the lead researcher and NGB Performance Director (PD) agreed that an intervention that aimed to: i) improve swimmers' self-awareness; ii) increase the ability of significant others to recognise and support wellbeing; iii) provide knowledge and information on transitions through career and life stages (e.g., advancing through age groups, managing school changes, entering exam periods) so that swimmers could anticipate and prepare for them; iv) promote the development of a holistic identity; and v) support athletes to develop strategies for managing change and uncertainty, may be beneficial to supporting the wellbeing of swimmers.

The PD requested that the intervention be delivered as an embedded part of the NGB's National Squad training and development programme. The National Development Squad comprises athletes aged between 13-20 years of age. For females aged under 17 years of age and males under 18 years, to be selected for the squad they must be ranked within the top 16 in the UK in any Olympic events. For those aged between 17/18 and 20 years of age, they need to achieve set performance criteria, which were developed based on the world top 16 long course ranking times. Overall, those athletes who are selected into the squad had either already achieved or were perceived to have the potential to achieve on the international stage.

All were training five to six days per week (typically two sessions a day alongside completing land training) and aimed, as a minimum, to place in the finals of the British National Swimming Championships.

A series of workshops were developed that addressed these core needs identified in the previous research and observation phases. Two months were spent preparing the content of the workshops based on extant literature and engaging in informal conversations to seek feedback and advice on their design and delivery. Informal conversations were carried out with swimmers who would be receiving the intervention, to check that the topics appealed to them and to gain feedback on any additional topics they felt the workshops could support, in relation to their wellbeing. Insights were also sought from practitioners who had previously delivered workshops to high performance swimmers regarding the level to pitch workshops and engagement suggestions. Furthermore, guidance on the best time for delivery was sought, with the PD suggesting that all workshops should be scheduled for Saturdays between 11am and 12pm, to fit in with the attendees' other swimming commitments, and be delivered online.

*****Insert Figure 1 Around Here *****

Intervention Design

The intervention was a multicomponent positive psychology intervention (van Agteren et al., 2021) that comprised eight workshops; six were delivered to swimmers, one to coaches, and one to swimmers' parents. The topics were chosen based on the definition and theory of swimmer wellbeing developed in the previous stage of the AR project (see Blinded for Review), and the ongoing observations and reflections of the lead researcher. In essence, the swimmers appeared to need: to understand what WB meant from their perspective to identify personal wellbeing protection and promotion practices; to be able to navigate career transitions; to understand the value of a holistic (rather than foreclosed) identity; to

communicate with coaches, teammates, parents, and support staff; and to manage their emotions during challenging times to protect and promote their wellbeing. Multiple positive psychology approaches were used for the activities (e.g., reflecting on a best possible self or learning to use personal strengths). Topics and activities were matched based on their compatibility, but the relevance of the topic to swimmer WB based on the AR process took precedence over a specific psychological approach (e.g., helping swimmers understand what WB meant to them was identified as a priority in the AR process, so a character strengths and values activity was used to help swimmers identify the key elements of wellbeing for them). An overview of each workshop is provided in Table 1.

*****Insert Table 1 Here *****

Intervention Attendance

Invitations to attend the workshops were sent via an email from the NGB two weeks before the start of the first session, and a reminder email containing the Zoom link was sent a week before each session. In total, 55 swimmers were invited to the swimmer sessions, which included all swimmers who were in the NGB's National Development Squad.

The parents of these swimmers were invited to the parent session which, based on the assumption that one parent would attend per swimmer and that each parent only had one swimmer in the squad, included 55 parents. All coaches (n= 35) who were part of the NGB's coach development programme were invited to the coach session. Of the 55 swimmers who were invited, 46 swimmers attended at least one of the swimmer workshops (see Table 2 for breakdown of attendance). In addition, 22 of the parents and 17 coaches attended their workshops.

*****Insert Table 2 Here *****

Intervention Delivery

To fit with their schedule, the NGB requested that the intervention be delivered over a period of 3-months, with swimmer workshops taking place fortnightly - apart from a 4-week break between sessions two and three, and a 3-week break between sessions four and five, due to scheduled competitions. The parent workshop took place immediately after the first swimmer workshop and the coach workshop took place after the fourth swimmer workshop.

To maximise engagement, steps were taken to ensure that swimmer, parent, and coach workshops were all designed to include opportunities for peer-to-peer interactions, for example, through group-based discussions using the ‘breakout rooms’ feature on Zoom. Further, in seeking to enhance engagement within the swimmer sessions, guidance was adopted from literature specifically related to the delivery of sport psychology within group contexts and Gen Z (i.e., those born in 1997 or later) populations (Gould et al., 2020; Gould & Szczygiel, 2017). Specifically, recognising that Gen Z populations may need more interaction activities than older generations, regular opportunities to engage were embedded during each workshop, via the inclusion of quizzes and creative activities (i.e., word clouds, drawing) facilitated by free-to-use online programmes such as Kahoot.

To further enhance engagement, a professional¹ swimmer, in her late twenties, facilitated the delivery of the swimmer workshops alongside the lead researcher. The professional swimmer’s role was to share their personal experiences and reflections related to the workshop topic, and act as a role model. They had experienced sustained success at international competition, achieving five gold, seven silver, and four bronze medals whilst representing their country but had recently retired.

Intervention Evaluation

¹ We recognise that the term professional is not typically used when describing swimmers due to the often-limited financial compensation that swimmers receive for competing. However, the term professional has been used here because this is the terminology the swimmer used to describe themselves because, prior to retirement, swimming had been their sole and fulltime profession.

Institutional research ethics board approval was obtained prior to delivering the intervention. The intervention was evaluated formally via interviews (following the coach, parent, and before, during, and after the swimmer intervention, weekly diaries from swimmers, and qualitative surveys following the workshops. An example of the questions asked is included as a supplementary file. Additionally, informal feedback was collected from attendees during the intervention to shape the ongoing delivery. Specifically, informal information was obtained through reflections and conversations with participants. All who attended the workshops were made aware it was being evaluated and that informal feedback and reflections were part of the evaluation.

Formal Evaluation: Participants and Recruitment

Everyone who was invited to attend the workshops were also invited to take part in the evaluation. Information regarding the evaluation was included in the initial invitation email, including information about the different aspects of the evaluation study that they could choose to participate in. For swimmers, participation in the evaluation included three options: (1) completion of a weekly reflective diary, (2) participation in semi-structured interviews throughout the duration of the workshop delivery period, and/or, (3) completion of a qualitative evaluation survey after the delivery of the final workshop. Swimmers who were interested in participating in the diary or interview were invited to follow a link where they were asked to indicate the specific aspect(s) they would like to participate in and input their contact details for the research team to follow-up. A link to the qualitative evaluation survey was sent out to all invited swimmers after the delivery of the final swimmer workshop.

For coaches and parents, participation in the evaluation included either: (1) a semi-structured interview after the delivery of the relevant workshop, and/or, (2) completion of a survey. All parents and coaches received a link to the survey after the workshop. Regarding the interviews, the email that was sent out after the delivery of the parent/coach workshop,

asked those who were interested in taking part to contact the research team directly. In total, 28 swimmers, nine coaches, and 16 parents took part in at least one aspect of the evaluation. Of the swimmers, 12 were male and 16 were female, ages ranged from 13-20 years ($M = 16.4$; $SD = 1.66$) and swimming experience ranged from three to 12 years ($M = 7.6$; $SD = 2.28$). Most ($n=16$) competed at British national level and the remaining swimmers competed at international level ($n=12$). Five swimmers took part in all three aspects of the formal evaluation, two in interviews only, and 21 in the survey only.

Regarding the nine coaches, seven were male and two were female and they were aged 24-60 years ($M = 40.4$; $SD = 12.64$). They had been coaching from 4 to over 25 years, and all but one currently coached swimmers at national level or above. Three choose to participate in the interview and the survey, with six coaches choosing to take part in the survey only. Meanwhile, of the parents, two were male and 14 were female, aged from 41- 60 years ($M = 49.9$; $SD = 4.46$). Seven were teachers/education sector, two were self-employed, two were retired, and the remaining five had administrative roles. Nearly all ($n=15$) were parents of swimmers who competed at national level, and one was a parent of an international-level swimmer. Three participate in the interview and survey, and 13 only in the survey.

Data Collection

Semi-structured Interviews

In total, the lead author conducted 29 semi-structured interviews with seven swimmers ($n=23$), three coaches ($n=3$), and three parents ($n=3$). Twenty-two interviews with swimmers were conducted before ($n=2$), during ($n=16$), and after ($n=5$) the delivery of the swimmer workshops. Interviews with swimmers ranged from between 10.14 -42.38 mins ($M = 23$ min 50 sec; $SD = 0.35$). All interviews began with some initial rapport-building questions, before moving onto evaluation questions, except for the two interviews that occurred prior to the delivery of the workshops. For these first two interviews, the main questions focused on each

of the topics that would be covered and asked for the swimmer's opinions on the topic, expectations for the workshops (i.e., what they hoped to learn), and any requests for specific additional material to be covered. Interviews during the intervention focused on the most recent workshop swimmers had attended, asking swimmers to comment on how they found the workshop, what they learnt, what they enjoyed/did not, and whether there was anything else they would have liked included. The interviews after the completion of all workshops focused on the final workshop as well as all the workshops more generally.

The three interviews with coaches were conducted after the delivery of the coach workshop. These interviews ranged from 24.11 – 34.10 mins ($M = 27$ min 54 sec; $SD = 0.23$). The coaches were already known to the interviewer, thus limited time was spent building rapport. The main questions focused on the workshop, and coaches were asked to comment on what they had learnt, what they enjoyed/did not, and what else could have been included. Coaches were also asked to comment on the day/time of the workshop, the delivery style, and the activities included. Three interviews with parents were conducted after the delivery of the parent workshop. These interviews ranged from 32 minutes - 37 minutes ($M = 34$ min 50 sec; $SD = 0.11$). All interviews began with some rapport building questions. Similar to the coach interviews, the main questions were then focused on what they had learnt during the workshop, what they did/did not enjoy, what else could have been included, the day/time of the workshop, the delivery style, and the activities.

Weekly Reflective Diaries

Five swimmers keep weekly diaries throughout the workshop delivery period (13-weeks). At the beginning of each week, these swimmers were sent an email/text (depending on their chosen preference) with a series of prompt questions. These questions required the swimmers to reflect on the past week and were focused on how the swimmer had been feeling, how they were functioning, and how they felt they would have been able to have

dealt with any challenging situations. In addition, if a workshop had been delivered in the previous week, the questions included evaluation questions about that session (e.g., what did they enjoy/not enjoy, was there anything else they'd like to have seen included).

Unfortunately, despite the weekly prompts, adherence was low for some swimmers. Over the 13-week period, 34 diary entries were returned and, of these, 11 were from one swimmer, 10 were from another swimmer, and nine were from a third swimmer.

Reflective Evaluation Survey

In total, 21 swimmers, nine coaches, and 16 parents completed an online evaluation survey after the delivery of the final workshop. Initial questions in the swimmer survey focused on demographics and ascertaining whether the swimmer attended all, some, or none of the workshops. If swimmers indicated that they only attended some or none of the workshops, they were asked for their reasons why this was the case. Next, there were some general questions that aimed to evaluate the workshops overall; this section included questions focused on the swimmer's overall enjoyment of the workshops, their thoughts about the days and times of the workshops, workshop length, delivery style, activities, and the inclusion of a professional swimmer. Finally, swimmers were asked more specific questions relating to each of the workshops they attended. The coach and parent surveys were identical and asked participants the following questions: (1) what were the key things you learnt during the workshop?; (2) what did you enjoy the most/find most useful during the workshop?; (3) was there anything you did not enjoy or find helpful in the workshop?; and (4) is there anything else you would like to have seen included in the workshop?

Researcher Reflexive Diary

The lead researcher used a reflexive diary to document her experiences. She completed the diary after the delivery of each workshop, after every interview, and after each informal conversation related to the study. The diary was used to record information such as what had

happened, why certain things may have happened or been said, as well as to interpret the benefits of possible changes. In addition, informal discussions with the professional swimmer after each swimmer workshop were recorded in the diary.

Informal Feedback

All workshop attendees were also invited to provide informal feedback regarding the workshop(s). The lead research provided an email address and phone number so that feedback could be sent directly to her, although attendees were also given the option to email feedback via a gatekeeper and assured it would be anonymised before being sent to me. No informal feedback was received anonymously. One swimmer provided email feedback, and two swimmers provided feedback via Whatsapp messages. In addition, one parent provided feedback via Whatsapp on the positive impact they associated with the swimmer workshops.

Data Analysis

Prior to analysis, audio data were transcribed verbatim. This included the interview data, as well as some diary entries for one swimmer who choose to send them as voice notes. Subsequently, reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019) was used to analyse the qualitative data. Specifically, the lead researcher immersed herself in the data, which involved reading the interview transcripts, diary entries, and survey responses several times. During this stage, she also re-listened to the audio files, read through informal feedback, and re-familiarised herself with reflections. Throughout this phase, initial thoughts regarding some of the key themes that were in the data were recorded, such as the strengths of online delivery but also potential limitations. Next, she re-visited the data and generated codes for individual segments of the data. A combination of semantic coding to record explicit, surface-level meaning, as well as latent coding to capture some of the underlying meaning and ideas that were identified. For example, the quote “I think I preferred the actual delivery as online” was coded as “online preferred” (i.e., semantic coding), whereas “I didn’t connect

and stay as focused as I did with the first one because it was repeating a lot of the things I already knew” was coded as “topic not relevant” because the interpretation was that the issue the participant faced was a lack of connection to the swimmer’s needs, as the content that the swimmer commented on had little overlap with previous sessions.

Subsequently, initial themes were developed by clustering codes together into meaningful groups that reflected key patterns within the data. To do this, codes were written on post-it notes so that the researcher could move codes between groups until it was felt that the groups accurately portrayed the data. A mind map was then used to organise these initial themes into themes and sub-themes. For example, code groups of “increased accessibility of online workshops,” “reduced burden compared to in-person workshops,” and “opportunity to fully focus on the topic” were designated as sub-themes within a theme of “benefits of online delivery” as each of these code groups could be adequately explained to demonstrate unique but related aspects of the benefits of delivering an intervention in an online format. The themes were presented to two senior members of the research team who acted as critical friends (Smith & McGannon, 2018) by questioning the interpretations and providing an alternative perspective. Following this, themes were refined during the writing process.

Methodological Rigor

The 12 criteria proposed by Evans et al. (2000) for rigour in action research were used in the current study. As Evans et al. consider action research to be a framework for real-life interventions, many of the criteria for methodological rigour overlap with good practice for intervention development. As such, researchers must pay close attention to their strategies to ensure there is sufficient ontological and epistemological integrity in their work, and not only a practical focus (Evans et al., 2000). Key strategies employed in the current study included addressing a commitment to solving a real-world problem, which included both addressing the partner organisation’s needs to support swimmer wellbeing and the need to better

understand what makes an impactful online wellbeing intervention; the use of critical friends (Smith & McGannon, 2018) to incorporate a cycle of critical reflection to enhance action, and strategic long-term approach to the project as evidenced by the 27 months of embedded work carried out by the lead author. Further details on how all 12 of Evans et al.'s (2000) criteria were targeted in the current study are available in the supplementary materials.

Results

Data analysis led to the development of themes around the delivery, design, and content of the workshops, as well as perceived opportunities and outcomes that attending the workshops provided participants. Consistent with McNiff's (2013; 2017) approach to AR, we have prioritised the presentation of knowledge generated through action in the results, with a focus on interpretation in the discussion.

Evaluation of Swimmer Workshops

Overall, the swimmer workshops were well-received; in particular, swimmers commented on how useful and enjoyable they found the workshops. General feedback from the reflective evaluation survey included, "I think they were really good and helpful," "helpful and informative," and, "really informative and useful for the future." Similarly, during the post-intervention interviews, Swimmer 5 stated, "[the workshops] were all really good...I loved every single one." They also commented that, as the workshops went on, "[the topics] kind of like all added up...I managed to put it all together then." Swimmer 1 shared, "initially I was like, 'oh great,' like I wasn't really vibing with it, but they were good."

Workshop Delivery

Generally, the delivery of the workshops was evaluated favourably, however, some challenges and difficulties related to the workshop delivery were also reported. Specifically, swimmers discussed; (i) benefits of online delivery, (ii) challenges of online delivery, (iii)

workshop schedule, (iv) informal delivery style, (v) timely and relevant content, and (vi) opportunities for interaction and engagement.

Benefits of Online Delivery. Many swimmers felt that the online delivery of the workshops worked well. For example, in an interview after the first workshop, Swimmer 2 commented, “I think I preferred the actual delivery as it was online.” One of the main benefits was how accessible it made the workshops. This was especially the case for Swimmer 5 who lived abroad, “it is very helpful for me because I’m over here, although if I was back home, either way would be perfect, you know, but where I am now, having not to, you know, travel.” For Swimmer 1, not having to travel to the workshops meant they could attend them without them feeling they were an extra burden, “on Saturday mornings I’m literally so dead I just want to sit in bed until the afternoon. So, it fit in pretty well.”

Another perceived benefit was that the workshops were not sandwiched between two swim sessions. Previous workshops had been delivered in-person as part of a National Squad day, where the primary focus was on pool and land-based training sessions, with a workshop scheduled for the middle of the day. As a result of the current workshops being delivered online, many swimmers felt they could fully focus on the workshop as they were not at the pool. Swimmer 2 explained:

I don't think it [workshop] was delivered the same way that they always have been, but I suppose, it's always been delivered in a classroom. Like you know, in between training sets when all you're really thinking about is the next session, so I think people probably sat and listened more than usual [this time].

Challenges of Online Delivery. Despite the benefits, there were some unique challenges related to the online delivery. For example, there were several technical challenges during some of the workshops that made it difficult to deliver as planned. For example, during one workshop, when using the whiteboard function on Zoom the screen

froze. A reflection was noted, “Initial thoughts on that session – not so good. Tech issues got to me and then I felt like I couldn’t get back into the right frame of mind. I’m not even sure what I was saying at one point.” However, speaking about the technical issues during an interview, Swimmer 1 recalled, “I could tell you were stressed. You were like ‘guys, I’m so sorry’. I was like ‘It’s okay’...I don’t think anyone cared or noticed so it’s fine.”

In addition, swimmers thought that the online format of the workshops impacted on interaction at times, because not all swimmers were comfortable having their cameras on or talking. This was particularly challenging when using the breakout rooms, “I ended up in a room with like four young girls who turned their cameras off, mics off, and it was just me sat there and I was like ‘okay’ and that was a bit awkward.” (Swimmer 2). Interestingly, weighing up the pros and cons of online versus in person delivery, Swimmer 3 concluded, “I’m okay with Zoom but I think in person you probably would have had more of an interaction with everyone, and it probably would have helped you as well...” From a researcher-practitioner perspective, the lead researcher reflected there were some issues with engagement as well. She recorded in her diary, “I find it difficult to tell if everyone is engaging because no one has cameras on. I have a feeling some swimmers log on then go back to bed for half an hour.” In short, it seemed that the online format presented a challenge in engagement that requires balancing respect for individuals’ autonomy (e.g., the choice to keep a camera off and sleep) and respect for the time of the practitioner.

Workshop Schedule. In addition to the online delivery of the workshops, the scheduling of the workshops (i.e., days and times) also influenced whether swimmers could (or would) engage. For most swimmers, the day and time worked well. This was reflected in the numbers of swimmers who attended the workshops (an average of 26 swimmers attended each workshop) and low dropout rates. Further, comments from the survey related to the workshop schedule included, “ideal,” “perfect time,” and, “very comfortable, didn't clash

480 with any other plans.” One swimmer elaborated, “[the schedule] was good as I was always
481 available and the fact it was a Saturday morning meant we had the rest of the day ahead.”

482 However, not everyone found the day and time suitable - the workshops were difficult
483 to attend for some swimmers who had swim or gym training on a Saturday morning. For
484 instance, in the survey, one swimmer suggested the workshops, “ideally would have been a
485 bit later as I train ‘till 11am so I had to miss a bit of training.” Other swimmers mentioned
486 that they found the time and day “alright” but noted that it was a “bit of a rush coming home
487 from training in the morning, maybe Sunday would have worked better.” Another swimmer
488 wrote, “it was okay, but I think I would prefer it on a Sunday evening.” However, speaking
489 about this during an interview, Swimmer 1 stated, “If you did it on a Sunday, I wouldn’t go
490 sorry. No chance. Sunday is for rest. I don’t want to be thinking at all on a Sunday.” During
491 the delivery process, the lead researcher reflected on her personal frustrations of being unable
492 to find a time that worked for all participants, but also recognising that this is the reality of
493 any intervention.

494 **Informal Delivery Style.** Comments from the survey mentioned that the workshops
495 were, “really well planned” and “delivered well.” Another swimmer wrote, “it was a nice
496 atmosphere in general, where I felt comfortable and understood or not judged by peers in any
497 way that felt uncomfortable.” Specifically, swimmers enjoyed the informal delivery style,
498 noting that this “made it more relatable and enjoyable” and “was very interesting and kept me
499 focused.” For Swimmer 2, they felt the delivery was enjoyable because the PowerPoint slides
500 contained a few short sentences that were the basis for discussion. During an interview, they
501 explained, “[the presentation] wasn’t too long or too many words...it wasn’t too in your face
502 but equally it wasn’t dry...I think you got the balance well.” This was important, as they felt
503 there was the potential for the workshops to feel like a lesson at school.

504 Swimmers also felt that having two people deliver the workshops made the workshop
505 more engaging. Swimmer 1 described the delivery as, “like a podcast” and Swimmer 5
506 commented, “it was more of like a conversation...so it kind of helped focus a bit more, in my
507 perspective, you know, it felt more normal to think, talk and communicate, if that makes any
508 sense.” The professional swimmer and the lead researcher also discussed the benefits of the
509 informal delivery style in several informal conversations during the intervention period.
510 Specifically, after the third workshop, the professional swimmer commented on how much
511 more confident they felt the swimmers were becoming and the professional swimmer felt this
512 was because of the conversational style of the intervention. The lead researcher shared
513 similar thoughts and was reassured that the swimmers were increasingly engaging in the
514 intervention.

515 **Timely and Relevant Content.** The workshops swimmers perceived to be the most
516 helpful were those that were relevant to them at that time. For example, speaking about the
517 identity workshop during an interview, Swimmer 1 observed, “it sort of came at quite a good
518 time for me because we had some time off and I was feeling a little bit bored without
519 swimming.” Meanwhile, Swimmer 5 enjoyed the transitions workshop because they felt, “it
520 was all good information to help take on with yourself - with myself - or future and like
521 thinking, ‘oh if this happened, I’d know what else I could do.’” In contrast, several swimmers
522 mentioned they did not enjoy the transitions workshop as much as others because they
523 already knew a lot about the topic and felt it was not relevant to them. For example, in a diary
524 entry, Swimmer 4 wrote, “The [transition] workshop on the weekend I didn’t connect and
525 stay as focused as I did with the first one because it was repeating a lot of things I already
526 knew.” During this session, it was apparent the swimmers were not as engaged as previously
527 as there were long delays when swimmers were asked to put their responses in the chat. On
528 reflection with the professional swimmer, they indicated that they had also noticed a

decreased engagement from some of the participants based on long delays in responding to questions or not engaging with chat functions. Despite the importance of navigating transitions for protecting and promoting swimmer wellbeing, it appeared that not all swimmers fully appreciated the content of that particular session, likely if they were not actively approaching a transition.

Opportunities for Interaction and Engagement. Overall, swimmers perceived the workshops to be interactive and engaging. For example, during an interview, Swimmer 1 explained that the workshops were more interactive and engaging than previous workshops they had attended, “compared to like all the other sessions that we usually have they’re so interactive.” Related to this point, many swimmers felt the opportunities for interaction were some of the most enjoyable aspects of the workshops, swimmer 4 wrote, “the thing I enjoyed the most about the [wellbeing workshop] was being able to have a bit of interaction by doing the quiz things.” Swimmers felt that, because the workshops were engaging and interactive, they were better able to stay focused throughout the session.

One type of activity that all swimmers appeared to enjoy were the quizzes and polls. For example, on the reflective evaluation survey, some swimmers recorded that they enjoyed “the little quizzes,” and “quizzes, surveys, Kahoots,” and, “Kahoot was good as it was competitive.” Similarly, another swimmer commented that the Kahoot quiz was, “one of the most enjoyable activities throughout the workshops.” However, apart from the quizzes, swimmers had different preferences regarding how they liked to interact and engage. For example, the drawing activity during the identity workshop received mixed feedback – for some swimmers, they reported that they most enjoyed “the drawing task,” and comments from the survey and email feedback included, “[the drawing activity was a] fun idea and [it was] interesting to see what other people said and also drew.” But not all swimmers enjoyed

553 this activity; one swimmer commented on the survey that “the drawing one” was the activity
554 they enjoyed least, and a different swimmer wrote, “wasn’t a fan of the drawing one.”

555 Similarly, some swimmers seemed to enjoy the breakout rooms and group work,
556 whereas others preferred to engage in ways that did not require them to speak. For example,
557 some swimmers recorded via the survey that they least enjoyed, “breakout rooms,” “speaking
558 in breakout rooms,” and, “talking in breakout rooms.” However, some swimmers reported
559 they did enjoy the breakout rooms on occasions. In a diary entry, Swimmer 3 wrote, “I
560 enjoyed the breakout rooms this time due to it being very interactive and funny” and, during
561 an interview, Swimmer 5 commented that the breakout rooms during the planning workshop
562 were, “quite good to get other people’s points of view on what their thought is about
563 communication and like you get not only your side but you get different points of views.”

564 Opportunities to engage with the professional swimmer were particularly valued.
565 Swimmers perceived their inclusion to be, “really useful” and “made the presentation more
566 relatable.” Responses from the survey indicated that swimmers enjoyed “having to
567 opportunity to hear past experiences from [professional swimmer],” “listening to all the
568 information and how it related to [the professional swimmer’s] experiences within
569 swimming,” and “input from [professional swimmer] which gives good examples from a
570 higher-level swimmer perspective.” One swimmer commented that it made, “a nice change to
571 have an experienced swimmer talking about her past experiences” and another stated,
572 “hearing [professional swimmer’s] advice was truly inspiring.”

573 ***Workshop Activities***

574 The workshop activities appeared to be useful in facilitating a range of outcomes that
575 were perceived to positively impacted swimmers’ wellbeing. For example, comments from
576 the survey showed that, by attending the workshops, swimmers learned, “how to manage my
577 mental health,” “how to manage my mental wellbeing,” and “how to look after myself and

578 ask for help if I need it.” More specifically, swimmers perceived that the activities provided
579 them with different ways of engaging in reflection and sharing experiences which improved
580 their wellbeing by helping them understand themselves better. Activities that seemed
581 particularly positive were those that helped the swimmers develop a clearer identity and
582 understanding their strengths, and experience reassurance and increased confidence. The
583 utility of these workshops was highlighted by participants’ application of their new
584 knowledge and skills outside of the workshops.

585 **Opportunities for Reflection and Shared Experiences.** In general, swimmers
586 enjoyed the reflections they conducted and the shared experiences they engaged with,
587 through attending the workshops. During interviews, Swimmer 1 told me, “you don’t really
588 have time to think about yourself really, especially with Covid now, [and] swimming
589 practice, assignments, exams.” Similarly, Swimmer 3 mentioned that they enjoyed, “all of the
590 meetings in general” because, “It gave me time to reflect back on myself and what I do.
591 Because you don’t really think of yourself, you just get through the day.”

592 In addition, some swimmers felt that the opportunities to share their experiences with
593 the group were useful. Swimmer 2 observed, “if it’s more talking, listening, hearing about
594 other people’s experiences and all that sort of stuff, it becomes something that you’re learning
595 from.” For Swimmer 6, they liked hearing others’ opinions as they felt it was useful for
596 interpreting their own experiences, explaining, “I just like being involved in stuff and getting
597 other people involved and being able to hear their opinions. I can take that on board and be
598 like, actually, you can see it from that way.” It was notable to the lead researcher that the
599 swimmers were actively engaging in discussion with each other and particularly interested in
600 what other swimmers were sharing.

601 **Better Understanding of Self.** Swimmers reported having a better understanding of
602 themselves because of attending the workshops. Specifically, swimmers reported having a

better understanding of who they were, what they enjoyed, and the strengths they possessed after completing an identify reflection and strengths identification activity. For example, in an email one swimmer wrote, “I found [the identity workshop] very informative and I learnt a few more things about myself that I hadn't thought about much before.” In a comment on the survey, another swimmer wrote, “[identity workshop] made me think on a deeper level about myself as a person.” A swimmer reflected via personal email to the lead researcher that doing a word-cloud activity about their strengths helped them “become better at identifying my own strengths in and out of the pool.” For Swimmer 3, they explained during an interview that the workshops, “make you realise oh yes, I’ve done this right or yes, I need to improve on that. So it does make you think what can I improve and what am I doing well.” It seemed that by encouraging swimmers to reflect on who they wanted to be and the strengths they had, participants were better able to identify how to use their strengths to promote and protect their wellbeing in ways that aligned with their identity.

Reassurance and Increased Confidence. Many of the swimmers reported the workshops gave them reassurance. Specifically, swimmers reported feeling reassured that there was support around them. One swimmer commented on the survey that the activity in which they were asked to identify their social support network (during the transition workshop) helped to reassure them that “there are lots of different people and things you can use and have as support to work on your well-being.” Similarly, Swimmer 5 wrote in their diary, “I have found reassurance that there is support out of my house.” Further, swimmers also felt that the workshops helped to normalise their experiences. Swimmer 2 commented:

I’ve thought a lot about what [professional swimmer] said especially when she said that she always got nervous and stuff before races and everything and I thought you know that is me you know that does mimic and mirror how I get and I’ve thought I think that my reaction was a bit extreme...it’s made me feel a bit more normal.

Use of Skills and Knowledge Outside of the Workshops. Many swimmers felt they

had been able to use the knowledge and skills they had gained from the workshops in their day-to-day lives. For example, talking about the social support section of the transition workshop in an interview, Swimmer 2 stated, “it has helped, definitely.” Other swimmers reported using information from the wellbeing awareness workshop. For instance, Swimmer 4 wrote in their diary, “I have used some of the wellbeing awareness over the past week.”

Some swimmers mentioned they had used information from multiple workshops to help them. For example, one of swimmer 1’s diary entries read:

I've used the wellbeing awareness techniques to spot when my wellbeing might've been a bit lower and used info you gave us in the identity sessions to help me during the week before when I had some time off swimming to put everything in perspective and realise that there's more to me than just a student and athlete.

For Swimmer 5, they used information from the planning and communication and managing emotions workshops to help them during a competition, they explained, “I have used the communication side of it a lot. You know, because in [location] over the summer, I’ve had points where I’ve done a competition and I’m like okay, that wasn’t too well. I’ve got to speak about it and how I felt about it and everything.”

Evaluation of Parent and Coach Workshops

Generally, parents and coaches evaluated the workshop that they attended positively, and feedback from the parent evaluation survey included, “it was excellent,” “[I] thoroughly enjoyed it,” and, “[Name] was brilliant and gave lots of tips for everyone’s wellbeing.” From the coach evaluation survey, feedback included, “it was a very well thought out and run workshop” and “it was a good balanced workshop.”

Workshop Design and Delivery

Parent and coach evaluations were largely positive, and many felt the way in which the workshops were designed facilitated their learning and enjoyment. However, some participants did not enjoy the online delivery of the workshops and there were also additional elements coaches and parents would have like to have seen included. Four themes were developed related to the design and delivery of these workshops: (i) delivery mode; (ii) relevance and usefulness of content; (iii) opportunities for discussion and sharing ideas, and; (iv) the use of real-world examples and scenarios to facilitate learning and understanding.

Delivery Mode. The online format worked well for many of the parents and coaches. For example, during an interview, Parent 2 mentioned they, “quite liked them online personally.” They continued, “in the nicest sense, we are all so busy it actually works quite well. So, I think for more parents they are probably happy, you know, just to do them online anyway.” However, not everyone liked the online format. During an interview, Coach 2 thought the worst thing about the workshop was it, “being on Zoom” and stated they, “100 percent” would have preferred it to have been delivered face-to-face. In addition, one of the parents commented that it would have been helpful to have the content that was covered sent to them so they could revisit it after the workshop had ended. They wrote, “[I would have liked] to have the information sent to us for future reference, or a place where we can find useful tips as it’s hard to remember everything although I was trying to keep notes.”

Relevance and Usefulness of Content. Overall, parents and coaches felt the workshop content was relevant and useful. Parents’ survey comments included, “it was incredibly helpful and timely” and “the content was useful and I’m glad it’s being talked about.” Similarly, during an interview, one parent commented, “it is such an important topic isn’t it? I mean, and if anything, I am not even sure we are doing enough on it.” Coaches felt that the content of the workshops was useful too. Coach 3 explained: “It was all useful like for different reasons. Either learning new things around it [wellbeing] or just like I say,

677 reaffirming and confirming why or what I thought already, which was always a nice thing
678 kind of knowing that okay, I am down the right track.”

679 Despite this, parents and coaches would have liked the workshop to have included
680 information and guidance related to supporting wellbeing in different scenarios. For example,
681 on the survey, one parent wrote they would have liked to have covered, “how best to deal
682 with my daughter during this difficult time with the COVID-19 situation as this is very
683 different to the normal struggles.” Further, one parent shared that she would have liked some
684 content on helping their child, “with the losses and the wins and the ups and the downs and
685 all that type of thing”, whereas a different parent mentioned they would have liked to have
686 covered, “how to help your child deal with disappointment.”

687 Coaches would have liked the workshop to have covered how best to help swimmers
688 manage school pressures and how to support swimmer’s wellbeing during exam periods. For
689 instance, one coach wrote, “we need to open discussions around how schools seem to be piling
690 on pressure.” As well as covering specific scenarios, parents and coaches wanted workshops
691 to include recommendations/signposting for specific professional services which could help
692 support wellbeing. One parent wrote, “how to access professional help” and a coach wrote, “I
693 think some recommended services would help.”

694 **Opportunities for Discussion and Sharing Ideas.** Parents and coaches enjoyed the
695 opportunities to discuss experiences and share ideas with others. For example, many parents
696 reported that they most enjoyed, “seeing the other parents and [their] comments,” and
697 “speaking to other parents and hearing how they deal with different situations that maybe you
698 have not yet come across.” Similarly, one coach commented, “I found the group discussions
699 in the breakout rooms to be really useful” and another wrote, “a chance to have coach
700 discussions and find out others experience is always beneficial.” However, not all parents
701 enjoyed the discussion as they did not see how it related to the workshop topic. One parent

commented, “It was nice to meet other parents from the squad but not sure much was gained in respect of wellbeing for our children when we were put in rooms.” Another parent thought it would have been more beneficial if the discussion was facilitated.

Scenarios and Real-World Examples to Facilitate Learning and Understanding.

Parents and coaches felt the use of hypothetical scenarios and real-world examples helped to facilitate their understanding of the topic. One parent indicated they found, “expanding key facts with practical, real-world scenarios,” most useful in sessions, whereas one coach wrote that the most useful part of the workshop was, “discussing with other coaches the same situations we are dealing with and working out with a scenario given, how we would react or work with the swimmers to find the best outcome.” Coaches particularly liked discussing real-world cases with other coaches. For example, during an interview, Coach 2 commented, “I quite enjoyed the scenarios to be honest. Going into the groups and discussing...it was good to listen to some more experienced coaches talk about how they would handle it.” Upon reflection, the lead researcher noted that this may have been capitalised upon by bringing in the professional swimmer to discuss their experiences to help support the coaches’ learning:

It would have been good to have included a swimmer (maybe retired) who could openly share their wellbeing experiences with the coaches so that they had a real-life example and chance to ask what type of support that swimmer would have benefitted from at the time.

Workshop Utility

By attending the workshop, parents and coaches reported they had gained; (i) knowledge regarding recognising and supporting wellbeing; and (ii) reassurance and increased confidence in their ability to recognise and support wellbeing.

Knowledge about Recognising and Supporting Wellbeing. Parents and coaches reported that they had gained knowledge about how to recognise and support the wellbeing of

727 their child or swimmers. For instance, one coach commented, “[I learnt] how to recognise
728 declining swimmer wellbeing and the different ways this can manifest” and another wrote
729 that the most useful thing they learned was, “having a structure of how to approach
730 [wellbeing] conversations and how to manage these.” Similarly, one parent stated that they
731 had learned, “tips on how to best deal with my daughter when she is down,” whereas another
732 reported they had learned, “how to manage talking to your child about their wellbeing.”

733 In addition to learning how they might recognise and support their child/swimmer,
734 several parents and coaches commented the workshop helped them to think about their own
735 wellbeing. One coach wrote on the reflective evaluation form, “[the workshop] highlighted
736 that sometimes I don't take care of my own wellbeing well enough.” During an interview,
737 Coach 2 spoke about how the workshop had prompted them to begin making some changes
738 to their lifestyle: “I’m actually beginning to sleep a bit better and I’m able to relax when I
739 need to ... I finish work on a Saturday at eleven, everything switches off and I won’t switch
740 anything on until sort of two o clock on the Sunday when I’m back at work at three o clock.”
741 Similarly, Parent 1 perceived the workshop itself to be beneficial for their wellbeing. They
742 commented, “It was really nice, I felt a bit pampered myself, do you know what I mean,
743 having something like that, it was really good.”

744 **Reassurance and Increased Confidence in Ability to Support Wellbeing.** Parents
745 and coaches reported the workshops provided them with reassurance that they were not
746 alone, which increased their confidence. For example, parents explained, “finding I'm not
747 alone, we all have similar experiences,” and, “finding that other parents have the same
748 issues” were key benefits. While a coach wrote: “[I learnt] a lot of coaches are in the same
749 position as myself ...identifying swimmers who could be struggling with either mental health
750 or overwhelming emotions with life balance as we return to normal life.”

Coaches and parents further explained they felt reassured because the workshop confirmed they were already doing the right thing. One coach reported, “I found the workshop helped reinforce the practices that we already use within our programme,” whereas another noted, “it reaffirmed the current processes we have as a club and that we are doing a great job on supporting swimmer wellbeing.” Similarly, one parent wrote the most helpful part of the workshop for them was, “seeing that as a family we are doing the right things.”

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to design, implement, and evaluate the delivery and utility of a multi-component intervention that aimed to protect and promote the wellbeing of high-performance swimmers. Our interpretations suggest that the workshops were generally useful to everyone who attended. Participants indicated that outcomes were fostered by the delivery of timely and relevant content (all workshops), the inclusion of an experienced swimmer (swimmer workshops), the use of scenarios and real-world examples (parent and coach workshops), as well as the opportunities for reflection and discussion. Further, participants reported that the intervention improved their knowledge regarding the topics covered in the workshops, as well as increased confidence in their coping abilities (swimmers) or their ability to support swimmer wellbeing (coaches and parents). In addition, swimmers felt that the workshops helped them gain a better understanding of themselves. Taken together, the findings suggest online interventions in the format outlined in the present study are both accessible and realistic for practitioner use, which should help to reduce the research-to-practice gap in sport psychology interventions (i.e., Ely et al., 2021).

The findings of the present study indicate that positive outcomes were facilitated by the focus on practical application of knowledge skills (e.g., communication, emotion management). Specifically, participants suggested that the focus on practical application meant they were able to apply what they had learnt outside of the workshops, which helped to

solidify learning and increase confidence. This is supported by evidence that suggests effectively transferring learning into practice can positively impact knowledge, skills, and confidence (e.g., Dowson, 2019). Further, the findings of the present study suggest increased knowledge occurred when participants had an opportunity to reflect, as well as interact and discuss with other participants. In particular, the benefits of peer-discussion were emphasised by parents and coaches. This is consistent with previous research that has highlighted both reflection and peer-discussion as effective informal learning strategies in the context of coach education (Nelson & Cushion, 2006; Nelson et al., 2006). In terms of peer discussion, it is likely this facilitated learning through the formation of *communities of practice* (e.g., Wenger, 2011) where participants were able to make connections and enhance learning through reciprocal questioning. Practitioners delivering online interventions in sport psychology may wish to consider how they can incorporate communities of practice focused into their programmes to better facilitate participant engagement and learning.

The inclusion of a professional swimmer was also beneficial for fostering positive outcomes. Specifically, swimmers felt that being able to relate to the professional swimmers' experiences, especially regarding setbacks and challenges, provided reassurance and gave them increased confidence that they would be able to achieve a similar level of success. This aligns with the suggestion that interaction with role models can provide a way to envision what is possible for oneself (Savickas, 2013). Previous research on role models suggests that to be effective, the role model should possess similarities in relation to age, gender, interests, and background (e.g., Gibson, 2004; Ronkainen et al., 2019). However, the present study included swimmers with a range of demographic and characteristic differences and findings indicated that it was the swimmers experience that was particularly relevant here, rather than demographic characteristics. Therefore, when looking for role models, practitioners should

consider those whose experiences align with the aspirations of the target population, rather than focusing only on alignment between group and role model demographics.

The online scheduling of the workshops was both a benefit and a challenge to the acceptability and utility of the intervention. Working with the NGB to ensure the workshops were scheduled for a day and time where swimmers were unlikely to have training or school commitments was likely a benefit to participation, although some swimmers still experienced clashes. This meant some swimmers could not attend the workshops, or if they did, they felt that they had to make a choice between training and attending the workshop. Further, some swimmers that did log in may not have been paying attention because they had their cameras off, which meant the participant may have been prioritising sleep or other activities but wanted to appear present. This is important because feeling as though they must choose between two competing priorities may negatively impact swimmer wellbeing. Yet, it was also clear there was no ideal day or time for the swimmer workshops to be delivered and thus, a pragmatic decision to deliver when most are available is going to be required and can likely be facilitated by working with the sport organisation. Likewise, practitioners should consider the importance of rules about engagement in sessions, such as if and why it might be acceptable or unacceptable for participants to have their cameras off when delivering online sessions. While having cameras on during online learning may increase participation and improve learning outcomes (Alim et al., 2022), we recommend practitioners to employ equitable and inclusive strategies to encourage camera use and improve engagement rather than punitive measures which may decrease engagement (i.e., Castelli & Sarvary, 2021).

Despite the positive responses, there were several challenges that may have hindered the utility and acceptability. The wide age range (13 – 20 years) meant that topic relevance varied. Findings indicated that the '*preparing for transitions*' workshop was more relevant for younger swimmers, who had not experienced as many transitions and therefore found it

useful to hear the professional swimmers' experiences of these transitions. However, older swimmers had already been through many of the transitions and did not find listening to the professional swimmers' experiences as useful. Consequently, it may be beneficial to split the swimmers into smaller groups and deliver more tailored sessions if the resources exist to facilitate split delivery. In cases where the resources do not exist to split delivery, it may be worthwhile to provide multiple examples or activities related to the content that are tailored to the different career stages of the participants.

In relation to the coach workshop, one of the main challenges was related to buy-in. Out of the 35 coaches invited, only 17 attended. One reason for this may be that the workshop was seen as an extra burden on top of what is already a demanding role (e.g., Carson et al., 2019). Additionally, since the pandemic, coaches were being offered an increasing number of Zoom workshops on different topics. This had led to what has been described as "Zoom fatigue" which may have led some coaches to be more selective in the workshops they chose to attend. Given that athlete wellbeing is often seen as secondary to performance in elite sport (e.g., Mountjoy, 2019) and coaches are rarely (if ever) evaluated on how happy or satisfied their swimmers are, it is possible that a perceived lack of importance of the topic may have influenced coaches' decisions not to attend. Nevertheless, coaches play an important role in supporting athlete wellbeing and require adequate support themselves (Hill et al., 2021). This raises an important question regarding how to best sell wellbeing workshops to maximise attendance. One way may be to emphasise that wellbeing and performance are not – and should not – be mutually exclusive (e.g., Brown et al., 2018). Although this point was made within the workshop, future workshops may benefit from emphasising this when advertising sessions.

Interestingly, despite relatively low turnout for the parent session, the findings suggested that there was an appetite for more workshops in the future. Many sports often

keep parents at a distance, which can make it difficult for parents to access important information required to provide necessary tangible support in relation to training and competitions (Knight & Holt, 2013). In present study, the findings indicated the workshop helped parents feel included in their child's swimming journey, while also providing useful information on how they might best support their child's wellbeing. In addition, the opportunity to meet and interact with other parents helped them feel less isolated by providing access to a group of people with similar experiences, from which they were able to form connections and build a wider network of social support – a beneficial outcome that has also reported in other parent interventions (see Burke et al., 2021 for review).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The findings of the study should be considered within its limitations. Firstly, while feedback was sought throughout the intervention to enable changes to be made, very little was received. This meant that, aside from the changes to the breakout rooms, limited changes were made during the program delivery phase. The limited negative feedback may be due to the workshops being delivered and evaluated by the same person. To overcome this, participants were given the option to email feedback to a gatekeeper, who would anonymise it before passing it on to the lead author, and the online survey gave participants an opportunity to provide anonymised feedback. Nevertheless, it may have been beneficial to have provided another mechanism for providing anonymous feedback and suggestions for improvement throughout the intervention (e.g., via short online surveys after each session).

Second, although the swimmer reflective diaries were a good source of evaluative data, only five swimmers agreed to take part and adherence was low. This meant that the data collected from the diaries was heavily influenced by the experiences of two swimmers, and the findings of this study were heavily influenced by interview and survey data. In future, more creative approaches, such as voice notes, may be useful to gain reflective insights.

Finally, although the intervention aimed to protect and promote the wellbeing of high-performance swimmers, the impact of the intervention on wellbeing over time was not directly assessed as there was a lack of longitudinal follow-up. It therefore was not possible to know whether the positive impact of the intervention translated into the intended positive effects on wellbeing as athletes encountered different situations covered by the intervention.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to design, implement, and evaluate the delivery and utility of a multi-component intervention that aimed to protect and promote the wellbeing of high-performance swimmers. Overall, the findings indicated that the positive outcomes were facilitated by the delivery of timely and relevant content, as well as the inclusion of a role model (professional swimmer), the use of real-world examples, and opportunities for self-reflection and interaction with peers. Key challenges related to delivering a workshop-based intervention, such as ensuring the content was relevant and useful for all, in a format that fitted individual preferences were also apparent. Together, these findings offer useful considerations for practitioners developing and delivering their own multicomponent positive psychological interventions with athletes, coaches, and parents, and provide a starting point for researchers looking to understand “what works” in intervention delivery.

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