



Exploring the career experiences and reflections of Special Olympics Canada National Team Program coaches

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Coaching in Special Olympics can be both rewarding and challenging. A past study found that coaches face difficulties such as extensive travel, limited staff, medical concerns, behavioral challenges, and athlete injuries. They rely on planning, social support, and emotional regulation to manage these obstacles. Despite limited research on coaching in this field, Special Olympics Canada is committed to enhancing coach development through research and practice.

This study explored the experiences of Special Olympics Canada's National Team Program coaches, providing insight into their challenges and strategies. Researchers used narrative inquiry, interviewing 13 coaches (7 women, 6 men) and analyzing their stories through a structured thematic process. Their stories were analyzed using a **7-step thematic process**, and their experiences were captured in **three composite narratives**:

- **Coach:** a first-time national coach navigating athlete behavior, emotions, and caregiving responsibilities.
- **Coach:** a mother of a child with a disability who balances coaching with advocacy, patience, and creativity.
- **Coach:** a recently retired coach reflecting on his career and offering suggestions for improving coach learning.

Findings and Implications: Coaches take on caregiving responsibilities, such as managing medication, assisting with accommodations, and supporting athletes' daily needs during competitions. Many felt unprepared for aspects of their role, highlighting the need for structured learning and mentorship to build confidence and effectiveness.

Mentorship programs can provide guidance, knowledge, and support, helping coaches navigate the unique demands of Special Olympics coaching. Future collaboration in areas like mental health, gender equity, and coach education can further strengthen coach development. Investing in mentorship ensures healthier athletes, stronger teams, and a more inclusive sport community.

KEY MESSAGES

Enhance Coach Mentorship:

Structured mentorship programs provide essential support, helping coaches gain confidence and improve athlete care.

Prepare Coaches for Caregiving

Duties: Training and hands-on experience can equip coaches for responsibilities like medication management and accommodations.

Expand Coach Education:

Addressing gaps in mental health, gender equity, and coach training will strengthen coach development and athlete well-being.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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