

**“I realised it was a different kind of culture to other sports”:**

**An exploration of sport psychology service provision and delivery in Gaelic games**

**Summary Report**

**September 2023**



# “I realised it was a different kind of culture to other sports”: An exploration of sport psychology service provision and delivery in Gaelic games

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# “I realised it was a different kind of culture to other sports”: An exploration of sport psychology service provision and delivery in Gaelic games

## Summary Report

This report summarises findings from an article on applied sport psychology in Gaelic games published in *The Sport Psychologist*.

### Overview of Research

This research is the first published evidence to develop on applied sport psychology in Gaelic games and was conducted to inform the development of guidance set out by the Gaelic Games Sports Science Working Group and, more specifically, the Sport Psychology Sub-Group.

#### Study 1

To profile the field of practitioners providing services in Gaelic games, the services they provide, and their views on support provision in Gaelic games



36 individuals providing “support for mental aspects of performance”\*

15 females, 20 males, and one male and female

Online survey completed in March-June 2022



#### Study 2

To explore sport psychology practitioners' experiences of delivering services within the context of Gaelic games



11 sport psychology practitioners who were accredited or pursuing accreditation

8 males and 3 females

Interviews conducted in July-September 2022



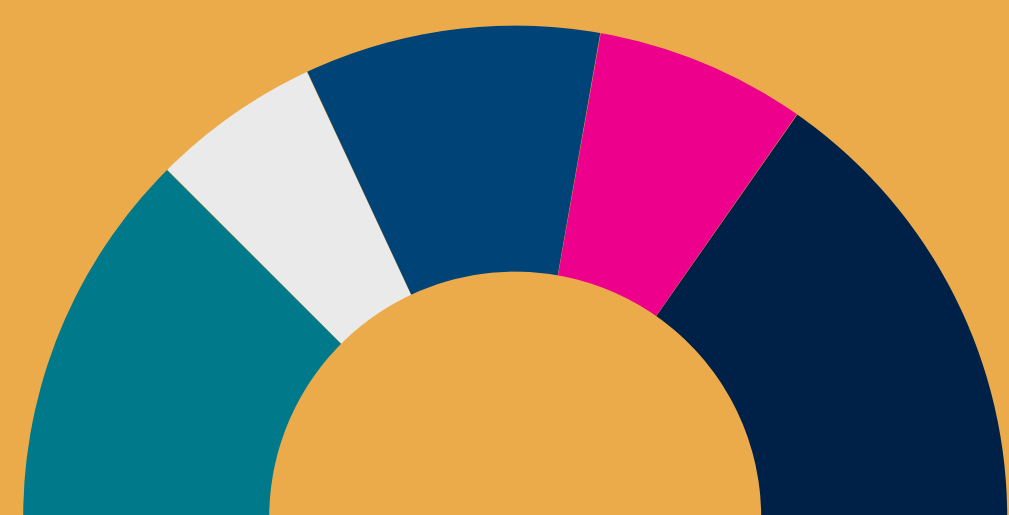
\* This terminology was used purposefully to reach a diverse range of practitioners, spanning registered practitioner sport psychologists to individuals providing what would be regarded as sport psychology services under other titles.



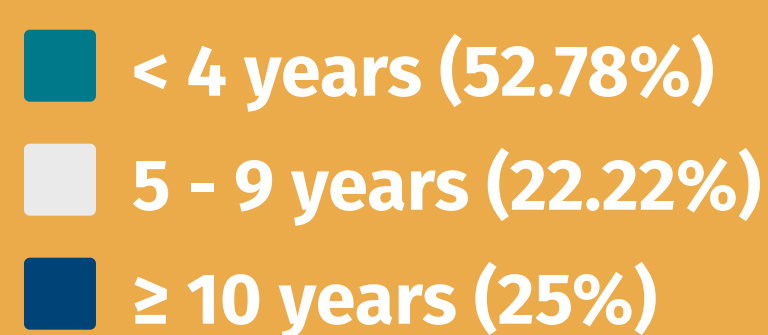
# Study 1 Key Findings

## Practitioner experience:

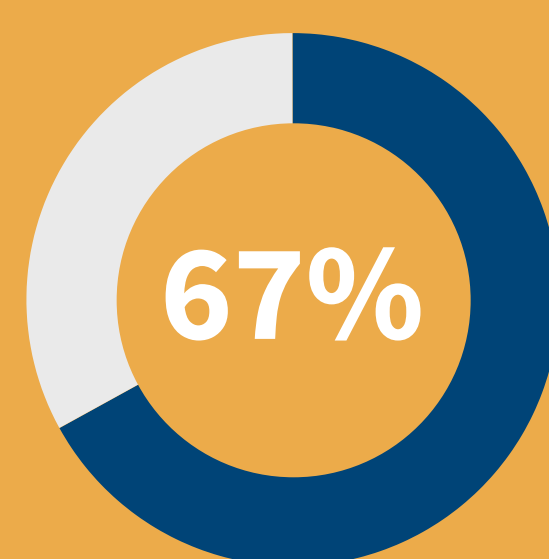
### Direct contact hours of experience in sport



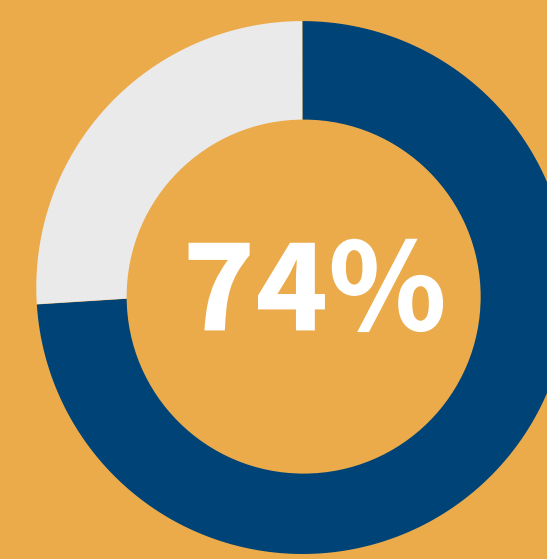
### Years of experience in Gaelic games



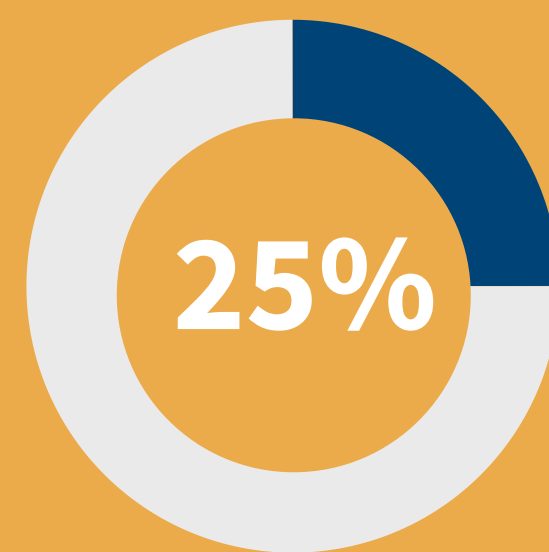
## Educational background:



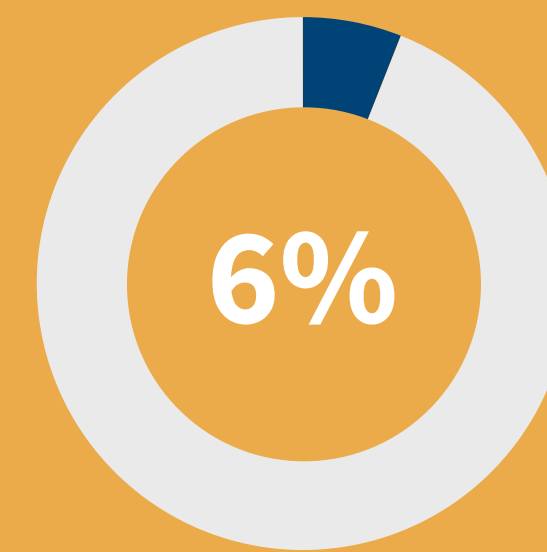
Bachelors degree in sport science or psychology



Masters degree in sport psychology or psychology



Doctoral degree in sport psychology or psychology



No qualification at Bachelors level or above in sport psychology or psychology

## Credentialing and titles:

53%

had some form of accreditation or chartered status

25%

were pursuing accreditation

22%

were not accredited nor pursuing accreditation

### The titles used most to describe the role:

1. Sport psychologist (39%)
2. Performance coach or mental skills coach (28%)
3. Sport or performance psychology consultant (14%)

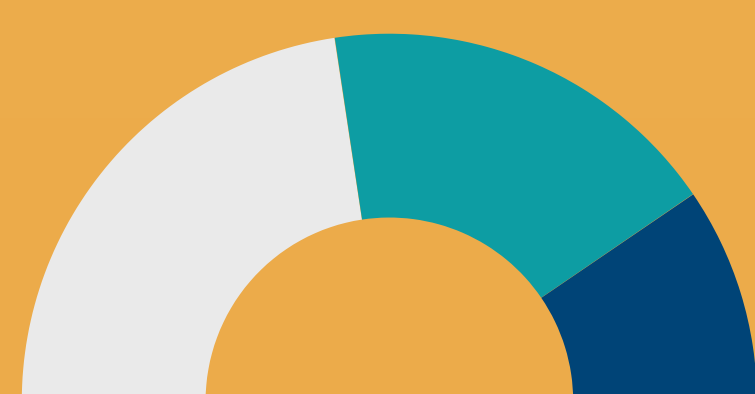
## Service provision in Gaelic games:

Participants were working with

97 teams

on a sustained basis, with >64% of these teams being male

Number of participants providing support at each level



58% of participants working with adult inter-county teams engaged with them at least weekly

80% of participants working with adult club and youth inter-county teams engaged with them less than fortnightly

64% Interviewed for position they worked in most

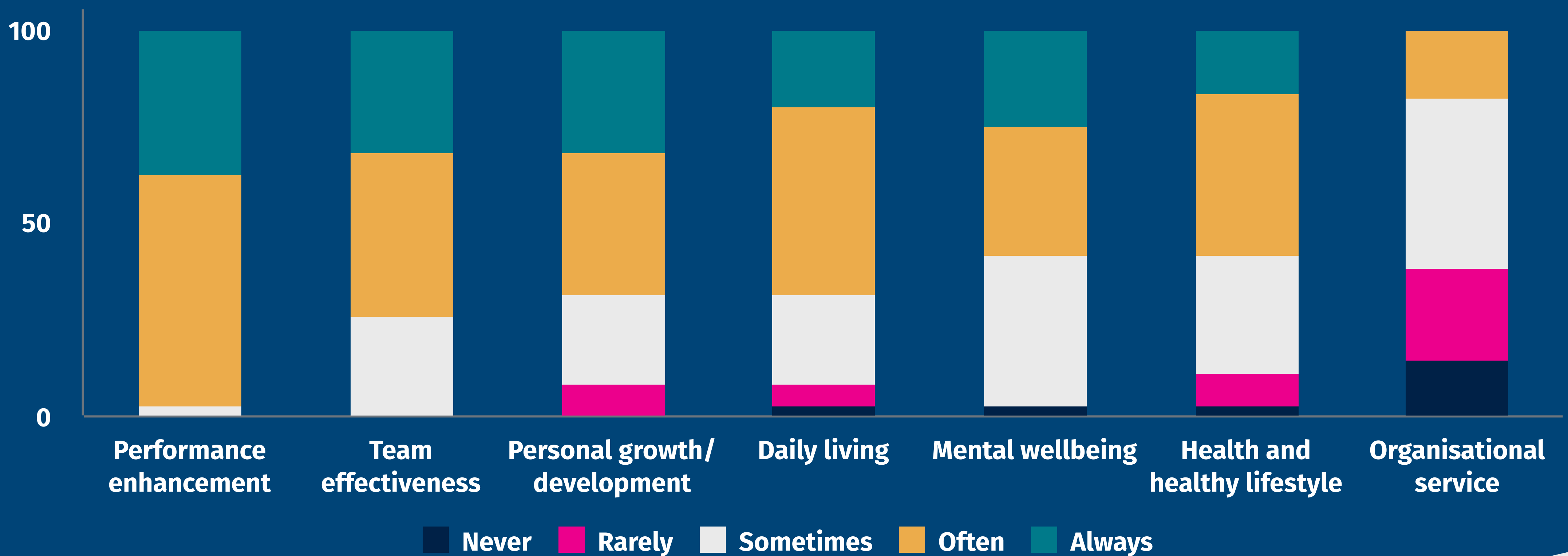
94% No contract in place for team they worked with most

€78 per hour Average rate for individual consultations

€226 per hour Average rate for group consultations

# Study 1 Key Findings

## Goal of services delivered in Gaelic games:



## Services delivered:

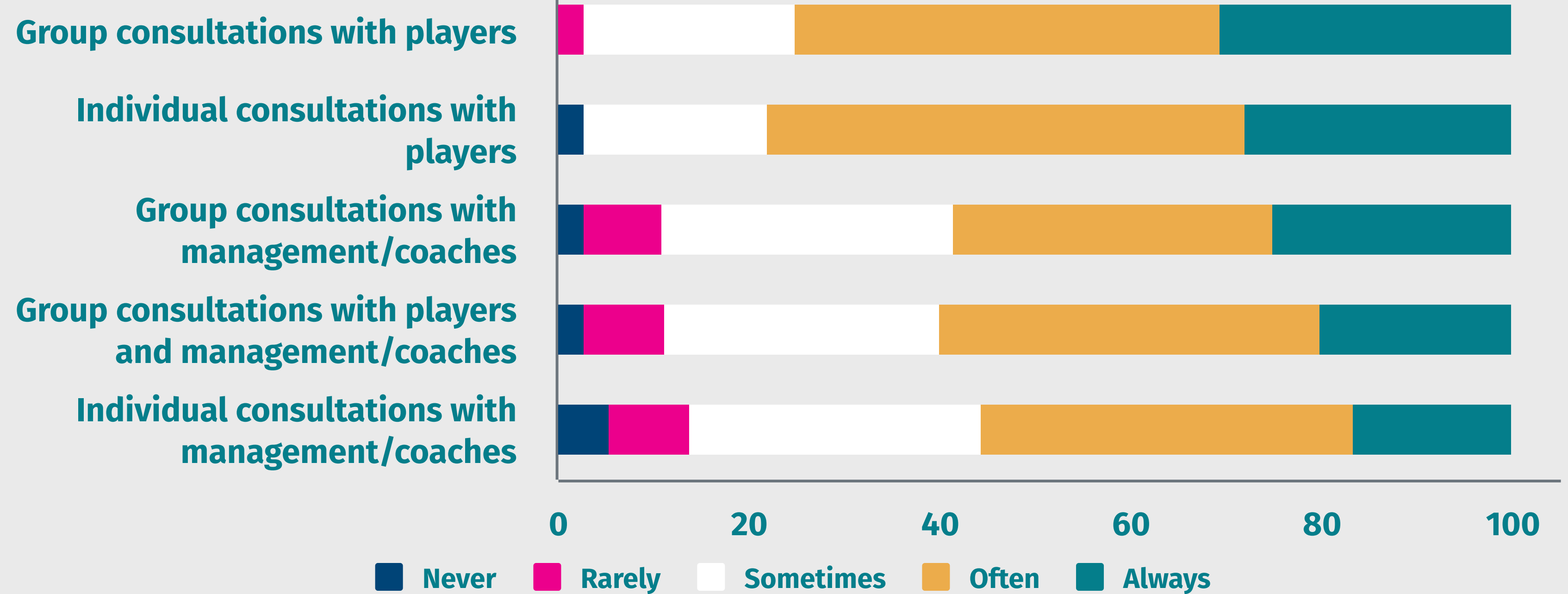
Interventions focused on group cohesion or involving team goal-setting were used often or always with groups by more than 65% of participants

Goal setting, self-talk, and breathing were interventions used often or always with individuals by more than 65% of participants

**82%**

of those referred clients presenting with mental ill-health

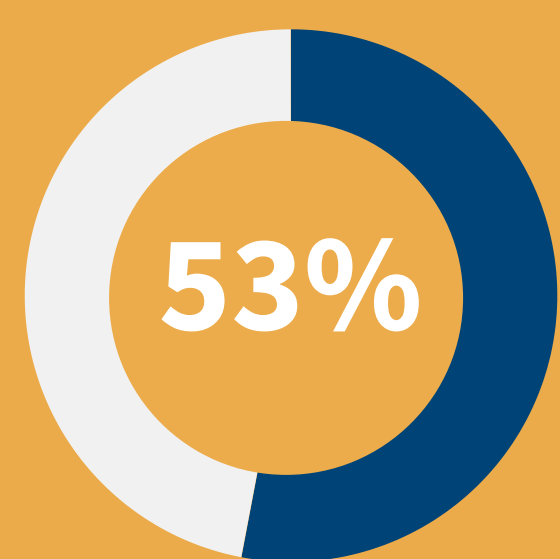
### Typical modes of service delivery:



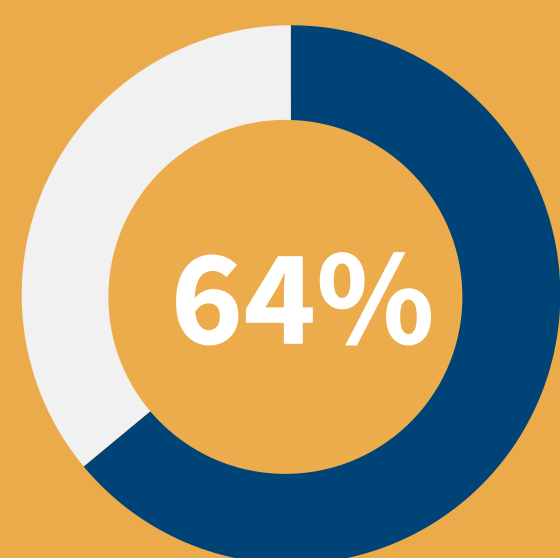
**78%**

were the main support provider for mental wellbeing, including mental ill-health

## Continuous Professional Development:



read journal articles or books or engaged with digital resources weekly



never engaged in supervision or did so less than once per year

## Views on Service Delivery in Gaelic Games:

**> 69%**

were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with regulation in Gaelic games

*“With no formal training route in Ireland for Sport and Exercise Psychologists, anyone can provide the support. There are a lot of people doing the work of a Sport Psychologist under the title ‘Performance Coach’, especially ex-players.”*

Problems encountered while providing services in Gaelic games included:

Lack of integration, engagement, and access

Misunderstandings and misperceptions about sport psychology

Negative attitudes and stigma towards seeking support



# Study 2 Key Findings

## Contextual factors and active ingredients influencing service delivery outcomes:

### 1. Variation in models of practice

Variations in models of practice were described, which were largely due to resource constraints and the agreement reached between the practitioner and coaches

### Continuum depicting models of practice:



**Contextual influences:** aspects of Gaelic games that influenced services delivered

### 2. Time

A flexible, time-efficient service was needed to maximise impact. Strategies used to maximise time with players included interactions before, during, and after training, as well as online individual meetings

### 3. Coaches' knowledge

Many felt knowledge of sport psychology and the role of a practitioner could be developed among coaches. Clarifying the services that practitioners could (and could not) offer was important to ensure clarity on the role

### 4. Gender

Few practitioners had been immersed within female team environments. This was attributed to a lack of funding, which exemplified the impact of inequalities on support provided for females

**Active ingredients:** elements of the intervention that lead to desired outcomes

### Level of coach and athlete buy-in

Buy-in from coaches is key to gain entry to working with players. Bringing sport psychology onto the field and spending more time in a team's environment increases buy in

### Engagement between the practitioner, coaches, and support team engagement

Collaboration with coaches was central to effective service delivery. Strong working alliances with coaches involved trust and agreement on goals, expectations, and confidentiality

**Active ingredients of service delivery**

### Quality of relationships

Developing high-quality relationships, characterised by trust and rapport, with players, coaches, and the support team is key

### Engagement between practitioner and players

Addressing (mis)perceptions about sport psychology and clarifying services that can be offered is important to engage players



# Recommendations

## Recommendations for policy:

- 1 Improve regulation and professional standards**
  - Action is needed at organisational and regulatory levels to protect and develop the sport psychology profession in Ireland and give clients confidence that a practitioner has achieved a minimal level of theoretical and practical competence, and practices in line with ethical standards
- 2 Enhance knowledge**
  - Greater understanding is needed among administrators, coaches, journalists, and support personnel about the role of a sport psychology practitioner, the services they can provide and are within their competency, and how their support can be implemented effectively
- 3 Clarify mental health support and develop education**
  - Policies and procedures are needed for mental health at all levels. Education about risk/protective factors, how to recognise signs of mental ill-health, and how to respond appropriately is needed.
- 4 Address gender inequalities**
  - Funding constraints have implications for the provision of sport psychology services for female players. Action should be taken to address the inequalities in funding and ensure that female players have access to psychological support
- 5 Develop supervised pathways**
  - Graduates of sport psychology programmes should be supervised and have a clear pathway to gain supervised experience

## Recommendations for sport psychology practitioners:

- 1 Clarify role and its parameters**
  - There must be clarity on the limits of a sport psychology practitioner's role, especially in relation to mental health. A referral plan should be developed for cases of mental ill-health before commencing service delivery.
- 2 Develop contextual intelligence**
  - Understanding the context and culture of a sport is key. A contextually-intelligent practitioner should consider constraints in place and how service delivery can be optimised within these
- 3 Build relationships and collaborate**
  - Developing trust and rapport with the manager/coaches and wider multidisciplinary team can help to facilitate integration of sport psychology within a context. These collaborations can ensure that services delivered are tailored to the context and meet needs.
- 4 Proactively develop buy-in**
  - Buy in can be developed with players and coaches by connecting services to challenges faced, integrating sport psychology into on-field activities, and spending more time in the team environment
- 5 Adapt services to context**
  - Services should be delivered in a flexible and time-efficient manner, and using language, examples, and activities that are relevant to Gaelic games



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