The professional quality of life of sport psychologists: Development of a novel conceptualization

and measure

Alessandro Quartiroli*
Psychology Department, University of Wisconsin – La Crosse,
La Crosse, Wisconsin, WI, USA

Christopher R. D. Wagstaff
Department of Sport and Exercise Science, University of Portsmouth
Portsmouth, UK

Edward F. Etzel
College of Physical Activity and Sport Sciences, West Virginia University
Morgantown, West Virginia, USA

ALESSANDRO QUARTIROLI received his PhD in Sport and Exercise Psychology from West Virginia University. He is currently an associate professor within the Psychology Department at the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse. His main areas of professional interest include professional practice and development and ethical and effective practice.

CHRISTOPHER R. D. WAGSTAFF received his PhD from University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, UK in Sport Psychology. He is currently a Principal Lecturer at University of Portsmouth, UK. He has published widely in the area of organizational psychology in sport, with projects relating to four complimentary areas: employee emotions and attitudes, stress and well-being, organisational behavior, and high performance environments.

EDWARD F. ETZEL received his EdD in Counseling Psychology from West Virginia University. He is currently a Full Professor in Sport Psychology in the College of Physical Activity and Sport Sciences at West Virginia University and a Licensed Psychologist in the state of West Virginia. He has widely published books and articles in the areas of Ethics and professional issues in psychology and sport psychology, athlete mental health, and performance psychology.

*Corresponding author: Alessandro Quartiroli, Psychology Department, University of Wisconsin – La Crosse,

La Crosse, Wisconsin, WI, USA. Email: aquartiroli@uwlax.edu

Abstract

Scholars within the field of psychology have increasingly reflected on the cost of caring and the quality of life of people in helping professionals. Indeed, the balance between the positive and the challenging aspects of this helping profession has become central in this discourse. In line with these developments, researchers have attempted to better understand Sport Psychology-Professional Quality of Life (SP-PQL). In this manuscript, we present the findings of a Delphi method study in which we aimed to develop an operational definition, conceptualization, and measure of SP-PQL. Specifically, we outline a rigorous, iterative three-stage Delphi process which was undertaken to reach expert panel consensus. In total, 16 participants with over 10 years of experience in sport psychology, completed the three-stage Delphi. This study extends knowledge on quality of life in sport psychology via the development of a bi-dimensional model comprising challenges to and strategies to foster (SP-PQL). Moreover, the Delphi process led to the development of a novel instrument to measure SP-PQL among this professional group. Definitional, conceptual, and measurement advances emanating from this study and future considerations are discussed in relation to professional development, education, and future research.

Keywords: Professional development, Delphi methodology, Effective practice, Ethics, Professional Practice

Public Significance Statement

This study advances the knowledge on sport psychologists' professional quality of life (SP-PQL). Specifically, a panel of 16 expert sport psychology professionals worked to consensually agree on a definition of SP-PQL, as well as challenges to and strategies to foster SP-PQL. Additionally, these experts also contributed to the consensus-based development of a 42-item assessment tool for training, continuing education, and research uses.

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Scholars within the field of psychology have increasingly reflected on the cost of caring (e.g., Figley, 1995; Maslach, 2003; Stamm, 2010) and the quality of life of people in helping professions. Indeed, a growing body of work exists, which collectively illuminates the substantial well-being challenges faced by those in helping professions, such as counselor educators (Wester, Trepal, & Myers, 2009; Myers, Trepal, Ivers, & Wester, 2016), student counselors (Myers & Sweeney, 2004; Roach & Young, 2007; Smith, Robinson, & Young, 2008), and professional counselors (Lawson, 2007; Mobley, 2003). Stamm (2010) argued that the costs associated with helping professionals include "compassion fatigue", which comprised burnout and vicarious traumatization. Nevertheless, Stamm (2010) also recognized that there are aspects of helping professionals' work that motivate them to remain in their profession, and labeled these positive factors "compassion satisfaction". According to Stamm, the balance of compassion fatigue and satisfaction results in an individual's Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL). In the field of psychology, the importance of ProQOL lies in the evidence that less satisfied practitioners are more likely to harm clients (see Lawson, Venart, Hazler, & Kottler, 2007), whereas "well" counselors are more likely and able to help clients (see, e.g., Hill, 2004; Witmer & Granello, 2005; Witmer & Young, 1996).

In recent years, the field of sport psychology has expanded greatly, with a growing number and range of individuals seeking helping and psychological services from a sport psychology professional (SPP) (see Tod, 2007). Given this growth, it is important for scholars to devote attention to advancing professional development and effective and ethical service delivery (Poczwardowski & Sherman, 2011). Further, SPPs operate in a volatile and precarious professional domain (see Gilmore, Wagstaff, Smith, 2018; Hings, Wagstaff, Thelwell, Gilmore, & Anderson, 2018; Hings, Wagstaff, Anderson, Gilmore, & Thelwell, 2018; Wagstaff, Gilmore, & Thelwell, 2015; 2016) and must continually adapt to the needs of their clients and professional work, resulting in practice becoming more complex than the mere application of theory via standardized

interventions (e.g., Neil, Cropley, Wilson, & Faull, 2013). Indeed, developing and maintaining a wide range of professional competencies is fundamental to the effective practice of sport psychologists (cf. Fletcher & Maher, 2013; Tenenbaum, Lidor, Papaianou, & Samulski, 2003), with such competencies being affected by the personal and professional lives of SPPs in the course of their everyday working lives and over their careers.

Little attention has been paid to the personal and professional demands that SPPs encounter (cf. Cropley et al., 2016) or the strategies they use to succeed in their careers. To elaborate, despite being trained to help others cope with demanding circumstances, SPPs must fulfill such roles, while also managing challenges in their own personal and professional lives. Indeed, scholars have recently noted the importance of effective coping strategies among SPPs to maintain wellbeing and performance (see e.g., Cropley et al., Fletcher, Rumbold, Tester, & Coombes, 2011; Hings, Wagstaff, Thelwell et al., 2018; Hings, Wagstaff, Anderson et al., 2018). SPPs may also experience challenges associated with ethical boundaries, with researchers (e.g., Quartiroli & Etzel, 2012; Stapleton et al., 2010) highlighting the potential negative impact of such challenges on individuals' professional quality of life. For example, Quartiroli and Etzel (2012) proposed that SPPs should be included among those professionals who experience both compassion fatigue and satisfaction that can affect ProQOL (Stamm, 2010). To test this assumption, Quartiroli and Etzel measured the level of ProQOL of SPPs using Stamm's (2010) Professional Quality of Life scale (ProQOL-V). While the authors' findings revealed generally high levels of ProQOL among practitioners, Quartiroli and Etzel (2012), noted that the ProQOL-V instrument was not designed to measure ProQOL relative to sport psychology practice, and that it failed to reflect nuances of SPP's work, such as their unique clientele, atypical work settings, and multiple roles (cf. Andersen et al., 2001; McCann, 2000).

In light of these limitations, in a recent study, twenty globally-situated senior SPPs were interviewed about their Sport Psychology-Professional Quality of Life (SP-PQL) (Quartiroli, Etzel, Knight, Zakrajsek, in press; Quartiroli, Knight, Etzel, Zakrajsek, in press). The data revealed five themes relevant to SP-PQL: (a) the lived experience of SP-PQL; (b) the nature of the profession; (c) SP-PQL as an ongoing journey; (d) deliberate engagement in the profession, and; (e) the

interconnection between personal and professional life (Quartiroli, Etzel, et al. in press). These themes indicated a multifaceted conceptualization of SP-PQL. The SPP participants also reported a generally positive SP-PQL, and highlighted numerous satisfactory aspects of their profession (e.g., control over profession-related decision making, working environment quality, work-life balance) as key contributing factors to their SP-PQL. Additionally, a range of challenges and strategies were reportedly used by SPPs to meet the demands of their profession (Quartiroli, Knight, et al., in press). That is, the SPPs described numerous challenges they faced while fostering and sustaining their professional practice and lives. For example, some of the challenges SPPs faced included the provision of client-centered support, which often unfolded in non-traditional settings, poor working conditions, and ambiguous professional roles (Andersen, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 2001; Etzel & Watson, 2006; Stapleton, Hankes, Hays, & Parham, 2010; Waumsley, Hemmings, & Payne, 2010). SPPs also reported the desire to be perceived as competent, effective professionals in the face of varying, and often unrealistic, or misinformed, expectations for professional services by clients, coaches, and others (Quartiroli, Knight, et al., in press, see also Hings, Wagstaff, Thelwell, et al., 2018). On the other hand, SPPs helpful in counteracting the challenges they faced. For example, within their professional sphere, they valued the importance of aiming to effectively communicate with clients, coaches, professional colleagues, personal family and friends about their services, boundaries, practice characteristics, and professional roles. They also acknowledged the importance of engaging in self-care to support their professional quality of life (Quartiroli, Etzel, Knight, Zakrajsek, 2018; Quartiroli, Knight, et al., in press).

The present study aimed to extend these findings by developing a definition, conceptualization, and measure of SP-PQL. The benefits of such outcomes lie in their applied and research use. In order to address the research aims, a Delphi method (see Dalkey & Helmer, 1963) was used to integrate content-driven knowledge from experts

Method

Design

The Delphi method was described by Kaynak and Macauley (1984) as, "a unique method of eliciting and refining group judgement based on the rationale that a group of experts is better than one expert when exact knowledge is not available" (p. 90). This technique offers a systematic, rigorous, and relatively novel approach to generating opinion and consensus on issues that require the input of geographically-dispersed experts. The Delphi method is characterized by four key elements: (1) anonymity of the panelists, which allows them to freely express their opinions without the pressure to conform to group thinking; (2) iteration, which allows the panelists to refine their views based on group feedback at each round; (3) feedback, which informs the panelists of the other panelists' perspectives, providing the opportunity to clarify and/or change their opinions; and finally; (4) statistical analysis of responses, which allows for a quantitative analysis and interpretation of data (Rowe & Wright, 1999). We perceived the Delphi method as the most suitable approach for a number of reasons. First, the panelists in this study were spread around the globe. Second, due to their busy schedules, the professionals involved in the study needed flexibility in when they participated. Finally, the Delphi method provided a viable tool for learning from highly experienced professionals in a short amount of time (cf. Brady, 2015).

The aim of the Delphi method is to gain consensus among experts by gathering data using a series of iterative questionnaire stages (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963; Keeney, Hasson, & McKenna, 2011). This iterative process involves multiple rounds of questionnaire development, each building on the results of the previous round (Keeney et al., 2011). After each round the results are recorded, analyzed, and returned to the experts for reevaluation. Over multiple iterations, the experts are asked to consider the composite responses of all the panelists, and reflect on their own responses. This system of feedback allows the experts to reassess their initial opinion, thus assisting the development of the measure in a synergistic manner. Strengths of the Delphi method include expert anonymity, controlled feedback, and the opportunity to conduct a variety of statistical analyses to assist interpreting the data (Keeney et al., 2011). These characteristics enable researchers to limit some of the common shortcomings of conventional pooling techniques, such as dominant participants, noise, and conformity (Dalkey, 1972). The consensus approach of the Delphi has been

used to build (e.g., Brady, 2015), further develop (e.g., Mosadeghrad, 2013) and validate (e.g., Culley, 2011) conceptual and theoretical models. Generally, such study designs involve at least a two-step process beginning with identification/elaboration of a set of concepts followed by classification/taxonomy development (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). A key tenet of the Delphi method is the proposition that group opinion is more robust than individual opinion (McKenna, 1994), and that group consensus is a useful technique for soliciting the opinions of experts in a given domain (Schmidt, 1997).

The Expert Panel Identification

In this study, the experts were selected following an initial review of literature and a theoretical sampling process aimed at identifying experts from around the world, and whose profiles could cover the heterogeneity of the sport psychology activities. In line with guidelines for the Delphi method (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004), we established four inclusion criteria for the expert panel. Those criteria were (1) professionals with at least 10 years of professional experience; (2) with expertise in sport psychology, (3) who the authors considered to be a globally-recognizable expert in sport psychology, and; (4) who had either 15 years of applied practice experience, and/or 15 peer-reviewed journal publications in the area of sport psychology. Introductory emails containing an invitation to participate were sent to 31 leading experts on sport psychology, from which a panel of 16 experts agreed to participate (response rate = 51.6%). Five experts declined the invitation because they were too busy to participate, and a further six did not respond. The final panel included experienced professionals with an average of 20.69 (SD = 7.8) years of experience working as SPPs, situated in the United States (7; 43.75%), Europe (6; 37.5%) and Australia (3; 18.75%). These experts spread their time similarly between academic (M = 53.5; SD = 30.8) and applied (M = 46.5; SD = 30.8) practice (see Table 1). The participants also had experience of publishing within peer-reviewed journals in the field of sport psychology. Specifically, all of the participants had at least 10 peer-reviewed publications, with ten participants having over 30 publications.

Of the 31 initially invited experts, 20 individuals agreed to participate and completed the first round (response rate = 64.5%). While all of these participants were invited to take part in the panel for the second round, 16 committed to participate and completed the survey, thus reducing the size of the panel (second round response rate = 80%). The same 16 experts also completed the third round of data collection (third round response rate = 100%). Although the optimal size of the Delphi panel is variable and depends on the purpose of the study, as well as the heterogeneity of the target population (see Martin, 1983), Dalkey (1969) argued that a linear increase in accuracy occurs when the number of panel experts is 11 or more. Other scholars have argued that a panel of 15 to 20 experts might be optimal (e.g., Dalkey, Brown, & Cochran, 1970; Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975; Ludwig, 1997). The results of this Delphi study developed over a three rounds of data collection and analysis. Prior to round 1, the panelists rated their own perceived knowledge of SP-PQL out of 100 (1 = no knowledge at all, 100 = complete knowledge), with ratings ranging from 53 to 100 (M = 81.21, SD = 13.75). Participants also rated their own perceived level SP-PQL (M = 77.37, SD = 17.93), which had a large range (30 to 99). See Table 1 for further information on the experts.

Procedure

In line with Okoli and Pawlowski's (2004) guidelines, the experts who agreed to participate were sent an email with instructions to follow a link to the first-round survey hosted by Qualtrics (Qualtrics, Provo, UT). Two follow-up emails were sent to those experts who agreed to participate, but who did not complete the first round of the study. Figure 1 provides a procedural flow chart.

The purpose of the first round of the Delphi was to extend the extant theoretical and conceptual knowledge of professional quality of life as previously developed within the sport psychology profession (Quartiroli, Etzel, et al., in press). This goal was achieved by inviting panelists to comment on the proposed model components (Quartiroli, Etzel, et al., in press), aiming to establish consensus regarding an operational definition of SP-PQL. Importantly, we encouraged participants to identify, comment, and elaborate on concepts (cf. Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). That is, the panelists were first invited to answer open-ended questions (e.g., "To what extent do you feel

these categories reflect the Professional Quality of Life for Sport Psychology Professionals and is there anything that you consider important that is not represented?"). Participants were also invited to answer similar open-ended questions to gather their opinion about the three proposed dimensions based on the findings of (Quartiroli, Etzel, et al., in press): (1) Multifaceted Meaning of SP-PQL, (2) Challenges hindering to SP-PQL, and (3) Strategies to support SP-PQL. Finally, they were asked to evaluate the importance of each of the 37 sub-components of the model (see Table 2), ranking the importance of each component using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "not important at all", 5 = "very important" to a definition of SP-PQL).

In the second round of the Delphi, the experts were presented with the list of statements developed from the feedback provided in first round and based on the operational definition agreed upon. This process aimed to develop a finalized, consensus-based, version of a novel theory-led measurement tool able to assess sport psychology professional quality of life. Participants were invited to evaluate each statement in terms of its fit for the construct definition (Fit) and its face validity (Quality). Specifically, ratings were made using a 5-point Likert scale for both fit (1 = very poor fit, 5 = very good fit) and quality (1 = item is not readable or clear, 5 = item is very readable and clear). The statements were then presented to the experts in three sections, reflecting the proposed dimensions, with opportunities to make open-ended comments after each section. For this study, we adopted Keeney et al.'s (2011) threshold for determining consensus. That is, we deemed consensus to have been reached when at least 75% (12 out of 16) of the experts were within a ± 1 standard deviation acceptability threshold. The second round concluded with the modification of items according to the experts' comments, opinions, and recommendations. Finally, following the removal of those statements that did not reach consensus, the third round was launched, which involved sending an individualized survey to each expert for final feedback and commentary. After the third round consensus was deemed to have been reached for the questionnaire items, and the instrument was finalized. This process unfolded within three months between May and August 2017.

Results

The present Delphi study included three rounds, during which the authors aimed to develop a consensual definition, model, and measure of SP-PQL. Over the three rounds of data collection, the authors gathered information about the panelists in order to provide a snapshot of their professional credentials, experiences, and engagement in the profession, which are presented in Table 1. The general findings are hereafter presented by round.

Round 1. During the first round of the Delphi method, the panelists were invited to provide narrative responses to a proposed model of Sport Psychology Professional Quality of Life, based on recent findings (see Quartiroli, Etzel, et al., in press; Quartiroli, Knight, et al., in press). A preliminary content analysis of the responses was conducted to analyze and categorize the responses (see Table 3). Throughout this analysis process, positive statements (e.g., "good job with the items") were acknowledged, but eliminated because they did not provide any content-based feedback to further develop the definition, model, or measure. A finalized list of 42 statements was generated and analyzed. It was noteworthy at this stage that several aspects of SP-PQL identified in previous research did not receive support. For instance, the categories "lack of recognition" and "public misunderstanding" did not receive support from the expert panel.

All participants provided additional quantitative feedback regarding the proposed definition of SP-PQL and more specifically regarding its three main dimensions: (1) Multifaceted Meaning of SP-PQL (5 components), (2) Challenges hindering to SP-PQL (14 components), and (3) Strategies to support SP-PQL (18 components). Specifically, all 37 components of the definition were rated as "Extremely" or "Very" important. The panel generally rated as important the respective SP-PQL dimensions of the multifaceted meaning of SP-PQL (M = 4.44, SD = 0.7) challenges to SP-PQL(M = 3.96, SD = 0.94), and strategies to support SP-PQL (M = 4.4, SD = 0.79; see Table 2). Based on the quantitative and qualitative feedback on the SP-PQL model that the panelists generated during the first round of the study, we developed a series of 46 different statements to be presented to the panelists in the second round of the study.

Round 2. Following content analysis of the qualitative data and of the ranking process from Round 1, a list of 46 items was developed and sent to the participants for rating. These items were

based on a combination of the experts' independent views and feedback on research-informed categories presented to them in Round 1. In line with the procedure undertaken by Keeney et al. (2011), we analyzed the results of the expert ranking for "fit" and "quality". First, we calculated mean and standard deviation of the participants' ratings for each of the newly developed 46 items. Panelists' ratings within ± 1 standard deviation of the whole panel mean were considered within the acceptability threshold, were deemed to have reached consensus and retained, while those rated as more than ± 1 standard deviation of the mean were considered outside this threshold and discarded. We conducted this refinement process for each item using the data provided by participants regarding the "Fit" and "Quality" of the items. The panelists failed to reach the 75% acceptability threshold for twelve of the items. Specifically, 8 of these statements did not reach the threshold for "fit" and four did not reach it for "quality". Following these analyses 12 of the original items did not reach consensus and were included in third round in an attempt to stimulate further reflection and reach consensus about the items as appropriate or inappropriate (cf. Keeney et al., 2011).

Round 3. During the final round, panelists were presented with the 12 statements that did not reach the 75% consensus threshold in Round 2. In line with the recommendations of Keeney et al. (2011), for each of these items we indicated the group mean and standard deviation. The panelists were then asked to read the comments and ratings of other panelists, to reflect on their own judgements, and then provide ratings of the remaining items. This round gave the experts an opportunity to further clarify the information and their judgments about the importance of each individual item. The analysis of the data showed that the experts reached consensus on eight of these items, while the remaining four did not reach consensus and were removed from the final list.

Discussion

In this study, the authors aimed to extend the emerging knowledge concerning the professional quality of life of helping professionals by seeking a consensual definition of the construct and by developing a measure of professional quality of life specific for sport psychology professionals. The findings provide a novel, expert consensus-derived conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement of SP-PQL, which have value for applied and research

psychologists. To elaborate, the definition and measure developed by the process was one in which SP-PQL was treated as a multidimensional construct, capturing respondents' ratings of their own SP-PQL via an instrument that would be reasonably quick and easy to complete, while being reasonably comprehensive in its coverage (see Table 5). In fact, this measure not only provides an indicator of one's SP-PQL, but also identifies the personal and professional challenges to and strategies used by SPPs to maintain their personal and professional well-being and longevity within the profession. These findings support and extend previous studies (Quartiroli, Etzel, et al., in press; Quartiroli, Knight, et al., in press) and highlight the importance of SP-PQL as foundational aspect of an effective and satisfying career. As such, we believe the measure will have utility for training, practice, and research purposes. Taking each of these in turn, we consider the potential value of this measure.

In order to safeguard SPPs, their clients, and the profession as a whole, it is important that SPPs are educated on SP-PQL. In order to achieve this outcome, educators and supervisors should encourage neophyte practitioners to be cognizant of the challenges they might face during qualification and training. Moreover, the work presented in this manuscript might be useful for neophyte and early-career practitioners by facilitating consideration of the strategies they use to sustain their effectiveness and well-being in comparison to those encouraged by senior practitioners and experts. Hence, the SP-PQL definition, conceptual consensus, and instrument developed here could provide a valuable yardstick for practitioners at each stage of their professional development. In doing so, it is our hope that this work will provide insight into the ways practitioners manage the demands they face in their professional lives, while also extending recent theoretical developments on the working lives of SPPs (cf. Fletcher et al., 2011; Cropley et al., 2016; Hings, Wagstaff, Thelwell et al., 2018; Hings, Wagstaff, Anderson et al., 2018; Wagstaff et al., 2015; 2016).

In addition to training uses, we also hope that following psychometric validation of the instrument, this measure will be used to examine the relationship between SP-PQL and various occupational and professional outcomes. To elaborate, recently researchers (cf. Hings, Wagstaff, Thelwell et al., 2018; Hings, Wagstaff, Anderson et al., 2018; Wagstaff et al., 2015; 2016) have

found practitioner well-being, intention to leave the profession, and performance to be associated with emotional labor (i.e., the process of managing feelings and expressions to fulfil the emotional requirements of a job). Given such findings, future research might examine the relationship between emotional labor and SP-PQL. Other valuable lines of inquiry include the examination of the relationship between SP-PQL and an individual's wellbeing, performance, burnout, and intention to leave the profession. Beyond the use of this work as a training and research aid, the authors believe the greatest potential contribution to professional development and practice lies in its value for self-assessment. That is, the findings provide further evidence of the salience of continuing education programs to include a focus on career-sustaining strategies important to fostering and maintaining their SP-PQL (cf. Quartiroli, Etzel et al., in press; Quartiroli, Knight et al., in press). We also hope the insight provided by the present work will help facilitate reflective practice. Given the present findings, it is surprising that major proficiency criterion developed by leading professional societies (e.g., Association of Applied Sport Psychology and American Psychological Association Division 47) fail to include reflective practice and self-care components, despite both being identified as critical competencies for SPP practitioners (see Andersen, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 2000; Cropley, Hanton, Miles, & Niven, 2010) and professional psychologists (see Fouad et al., 2009; Norcross, 2000). Hence, we hope the conceptualization and measure developed here might assist practitioners to reflect on the challenges they face and the strategies they use to sustain effective practice when encountering such demands, and inform guidance for organizational ethics codes. That is, we believe such knowledge will be valuable for both scholars researching the working lives of SPPs (cf. Quartiroli & Etzel, 2012) and practitioners employed in precarious and volatile sport environments (cf. Gilmore et al., 2018; Hings, Wagstaff, Thelwell, et al., 2018; Hings, Wagstaff, Anderson et al., 2018; Wagstaff et al., 2015; 2016).

      Further research is needed to extend this work and examine the reliability and validity of the instrument developed here. That is, researchers should examine the validity of the SP-PQL measure in relation to other instruments that measure related constructs, such as quality of working life and career sustaining behaviors. Moreover, researchers might also examine the internal consistency of

our measure over time. Additionally, due to its possible use in graduate and continued education, it may be beneficial to develop workshops to explore the SP-PQL of novice and expert professionals in order to extend awareness and knowledge of the construct, and to share the ways experts have fostered it throughout their careers. Further, given several categories (e.g., lack of recognition and public misunderstanding) did not receive support from the expert panel, but have been commonly reported in previous research on SP-PQL, it may be that further research aimed at illuminating the unique aspects of SPP's professional roles and work settings would be beneficial. Importantly, the numerous pathways to practice within the SPP professional domain may result more diverse challenges and strategies. For example, individuals in this professional domain have diverse initial training (e.g., kinesiology, sport and exercise psychology, and general psychology), role specialization (e.g., research, teaching, and consultancy) and domain of application specialization (e.g., sport, exercise and performance), and a variety of practice expertise (e.g., counseling, clinical, organizational skills).

It should be noted that the Delphi method does not necessarily provide the "right" answer to a given problem. The findings presented here are a reflection of expert SPPs consensus beliefs in 2017 and are likely to change as profession challenges and strategies to sustain careers evolve. Hence, this descriptive conceptualization and measure of SP-PQL may require reevaluation in future decades. Nevertheless, this approach is a systematic, rigorous, and relatively novel means of structuring group communication for the purpose of determining consensus between group members (cf. Coates, 1975). A potential limitation of the present study was the lack of experts from non-Anglophone countries with the sample lacking experts from South and Central America, as well as the African and the Asian continents. Given that cultural boundaries and norms might influence SPPs' views on SP-PQL, we would advise caution in applying our definition, conceptualization, and measure of SP-PQL in these continents until further confirmatory work is undertaken.

In conclusion, the Delphi method used here provided a valuable approach to establishing expert consensus on conceptual, operational, and measurement aspects of professional quality of

life for sport psychologists. The findings point to the importance of SP-PQL in the working lives of expert SPPs and extend previous findings. Such insights are relevant for training, professional development, welfare among professionals, and the advancement and protection of the profession. To the authors' knowledge, this is the first time that the Delphi technique has been used in this manner, and the findings illustrate that its use was fruitful, with the method proving relatively easy to implement and valuable for gaining consensus on factors of interest.

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Table 1. Panelists' Characteristics and Demographics

Country of Training	Specialization	Country(ies) of practice	Qualifications	Highest Degree	Main Area of Expertise*	Years of SP Experience	Academic Work %	Applied Work %	SP related work (h/w)	Knowledge of SP-PQL	Self SP-PQL
USA	Psychophysiology, Clinical and Counselling	Australia	Licensed psychologist (USA) Registered clinical psychologist (AU) Registered S&E psychologist (AU)	PhD	Performance Impairment	31	15	85	Retired	53	99
USA	Sport Psychology	USA	Licensed psychologist (USA) CC-AASP(USA)**	PhD	Performance Development	12	50	50	10	86	95
USA	Sport Psychology	Norway, Greece, USA	AASP-CC (USA) Certified Consultant (Hellas)	PhD	Performance Development Performance Dysfunction	21	71	29	10	92	30
USA	Counseling Psychology	USA	Licensed psychologist (USA) CC-AASP (USA)	PhD	Performance Development Performance Impairment	11	75	25	15	70	80
USA	Sport Psychology Counseling Psychology	USA	AASP-CC (USA) Licensed Psychologist (USA)	PhD	Performance Development Performance Impairment	18	50	50	20	90	90
UK	Sport Psychology	UK	Chartered psychologist (UK) HCPC (UK)	PhD	Performance Development	25	20	80	35	95	85
US	Clinical Psychology	USA	Licensed psychologist (USA) CC-AASP (USA)	PhD	Performance Development	36	8	92	25	100	91
UK	Sport Psychology	UK	BASES Accredited (UK) HCPC (UK)	PhD	Performance Development Performance Impairment	18	80	20	7.5	71	81
USA	Counseling Sport Psychology	USA	CC-AASP (USA)	PhD	Performance Development	17	25	75	40	95	80
UK	Sport Psychology	UK	BASES Accredited (UK) Chartered psychologist (UK)	PhD	Performance Development	11	80	20	10	92	85
USA	Sport Psychology Counseling Psychology	Australia	Licensed Psychologist (USA) AASP-CC (USA) Registered Psychologist (AU) Endorsed S&E Psychologist (AU)	PhD	Performance Development Performance Impairment	22	14	86	25	61	50
UK	Sport Psychology	UK	BASES Accredited (UK)	PhD	Performance Development Performance Impairment	27	75	25	4	90	95
USA	Sport Psychology	Poland USA	CC-AASP (USA)	PhD	Performance Development	21	81	19	6	80	50
USA/AU	Sport Psychology Psychophysiology	Australia	Registered S&E Psychologist (AU)	PhD	Performance Development	31	27	73	20	55	86
UK	Sport Psychology	None	Chartered Psychologist (UK)	PhD	Performance Dysfunction	10	100	0	40	70	70
USA	Sport Psychology Counseling Psychology	US	CC-AASP (USA) Licensed Psychologist (USA)	PhD	Performance Development	20	95	5	65	90	75
					Mean	20.69	54.1	45.9	22.7	80.6	77.6
					Standard Deviations	7.80	31.7	31.7	17.3	15.2	19.1

* The classification of areas of expertise followed the Multi-Level Classification System for Sport Psychology (MCS-SP; Gardner & Moore, 2004). ** The Association for Applied Sport Psychology credential name changed from AASP-Certified Consultants to Certified Mental Performance Consultant (CMPC) as of October 1, 2017

Table 2. Averages of the Importance of Construct's Dimensions Components

	M	SD	Extremely important		Very important		Moderately important		Slightly important		Not at all important	
Multifaceted Meaning	**4.44**	**0.7**										
SP-PQL as lived experience	4.5	0.6	55.00%	11	40.00%	8	5.00%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
The nature of the profession	4.4	0.7	55.00%	11	35.00%	7	10.00%	2	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
SP-PQL as a developmental journey	4.5	0.6	60.00%	12	30.00%	6	10.00%	2	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
SP-PQL as deliberate engagement	4.8	0.6	80.00%	16	15.00%	3	5.00%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
SP-PQL as interconnection between personal and professional life	4	1	40.00%	8	40.00%	8	10.00%	2	10.00%	2	0.00%	0
Challenges	**3.96**	**0.94**										
Sustainable career	4.6	0.5	55.00%	11	40.00%	8	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Limited professional network	3.9	0.9	30.00%	6	25.00%	5	35.00%	7	5.00%	1	0.00%	0
Professional travelling	4.4	0.9	55.00%	11	30.00%	6	5.00%	1	5.00%	1	0.00%	0
Public misunderstanding	3.1	1.3	20.00%	4	10.00%	2	25.00%	5	40.00%	8	0.00%	0
Personal – Professional trade off	4.3	0.8	50.00%	10	30.00%	6	15.00%	3	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Limited career opportunities	3.8	1.2	30.00%	6	20.00%	4	30.00%	6	15.00%	3	0.00%	0
Financial concerns	4.6	0.5	50.00%	10	40.00%	8	5.00%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Socio-cultural challenges	3.6	1	15.00%	3	35.00%	7	35.00%	7	5.00%	1	5.00%	1
Workplace environment	3.6	1.4	40.00%	8	15.00%	3	20.00%	4	15.00%	3	5.00%	1
Professional flexibility	3.8	1.1	20.00%	4	50.00%	10	10.00%	2	15.00%	3	0.00%	0
Multiple life roles	4.6	0.5	60.00%	12	35.00%	7	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Lack of recognition	3.2	1.2	20.00%	4	10.00%	2	35.00%	7	30.00%	6	0.00%	0
Workload management	4.1	0.9	40.00%	8	25.00%	5	25.00%	5	5.00%	1	0.00%	0
Self-efficacy and expectations	3.8	1	30.00%	6	30.00%	6	25.00%	5	10.00%	2	0.00%	0
Strategies	**4.4**	**0.79**										
Engaging in learning and training	4.7	0.8	75.00%	15	15.00%	3	0.00%	0	5.00%	1	0.00%	0
Professional networking	4.8	0.5	85.00%	17	5.00%	1	5.00%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Respecting boundaries	4.8	0.4	75.00%	15	20.00%	4	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Managing time	4.2	1.2	55.00%	11	25.00%	5	5.00%	1	5.00%	1	5.00%	1
Adapting and being resilient	4.5	0.9	65.00%	13	20.00%	4	5.00%	1	5.00%	1	0.00%	0
Planning ahead	4.4	0.7	60.00%	12	25.00%	5	10.00%	2	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Believing in training & competencies	4.4	0.8	55.00%	11	25.00%	5	15.00%	3	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Living and practicing spirituality	4.7	0.5	65.00%	13	30.00%	6	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Being flexible and open to change	4.7	0.6	70.00%	14	20.00%	4	5.00%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Teaching, mentoring, & supervising students	4.3	0.9	45.00%	9	35.00%	7	10.00%	2	5.00%	1	0.00%	0
Referring out	4.1	1	40.00%	8	30.00%	6	20.00%	4	5.00%	1	0.00%	0
Tailoring one's approach to meet clients' needs	3.8	1.2	35.00%	7	30.00%	6	10.00%	2	20.00%	4	0.00%	0
Relationship with clients	4.6	0.6	65.00%	13	25.00%	5	5.00%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Committing to work	3.9	0.9	20.00%	4	50.00%	10	20.00%	4	5.00%	1	0.00%	0
Offering pro bono consultation	4.1	1.2	45.00%	9	15.00%	3	30.00%	6	0.00%	0	5.00%	1
Using self-reflection	4.6	0.5	60.00%	12	30.00%	6	5.00%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Personal health behaviour	4.8	0.4	75.00%	15	20.00%	4	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Pursuing and valuing social relationships	4.8	0.4	65.00%	13	25.00%	5	0.00%	0	5.00%	1	0.00%	0
Applying SP to one's personal life	3.4	1.5	25.00%	5	10.00%	2	45.00%	9	0.00%	0	15.00%	3

Table 3 List of statements offered by the panelists

Multifaceted Meaning

Applying psych skills in personal lives is not linked to professional quality of life.
Impossible to divide professional value and self-worth based on clients
The potentially negative aspects of one's work will be face and need to be dealt with.
Using SP skills may play almost no role in professional and personal lives and may have little to do with personal needs and professional effectiveness.
Embrace in philosophies that help meet personal needs and increase effectiveness.
Working in large organizations reduces the ability to be autonomous and flexible.
Apparently main focus on private practitioners.
Lack of representation of practitioner's interest in working to help others, and watching people grow and change.
Importance of the activities prior to becoming an SP professional, which can enhance competence and self-worth within the SP field.
Deep core values about life's purpose. Guiding light based on spiritual or secular beliefs
Not enough focus on financial well-being (income; home; ability to support family; own hobbies, etc.)
Yes, these categories reflect the professional quality of life for SPP. They are all of extreme importance.
The language used in these short descriptions of each category can be improved
Lack of representation of the importance of relating, relationships and connecting with people in engaging ways

Challenges

Managing relationships' (especially with coaches, performance directors, and other stakeholders rather than the client).
A different question than if these challenges are common and/or controllable in our profession.
Financial concerns as psychology is often one of the first services to be cut in organization with budget cuts.
Public/Coaches/Organization misunderstanding of the SP profession.
Being a full time professional ASP and leaving the security of academia.
Politics/abuse of power that can block opportunities for work and development.
Pressure for results.
Level of athlete performance.
Mismatch of SPP and client goals.
Low level of SPP knowledge/skills/competences/confidence.
Stressors outside the SPP job.
Ambiguous/unclear client expectations.
Not working in a way that connects with personal values and that is personally meaningful.
Having challenges can be important to learn how to function better.

Strategies

Doing good work and take pride in it.
Engaging in professional quality of life becomes a 24 hour a day commitment.
Striking the balance between personal and professional life.
Engaging in discussion with other professionals as a coping mechanism.
Develop relationships, especially with mentors/colleagues with whom one can consult.
Engaging in continued education as a way to learn and grow.
Importance of the professional's identity(/ies) and roles of the SPP.
Personal faith has the most impact on professional quality of life.
The field failed to create clear, ethical, and sustainable business models; pro bono work does not seem to be useful.
Connecting what you are doing to your personal value system and what gives your life purpose and meaning.
Delegating effectively in team environments.
Being willing (and accepting of need) to quit when necessary, due to lack of fit or when being asked to act unethically.
Seeking feedback.
Not enough worthwhile fulltime jobs for SP practitioners, lead to lack of full disclosure or genuine friendship with SPs.

Table 4. Items ranking by rounds with mean and SD for Fit and Quality

	Quality			Fit			Fit (3rd Round)			Finalized Items
	M	SD	Agreement %	M	SD	Agreement %	M	SD	Agreement %	
Multifaceted Meaning	4.17	0.89		4.14	0.92					
My professional connections with other SP professionals positively contributes to my work	4.19	1.05	11 (68.75)*	3.8	1.26	16 (100)				Finalized
My profession is genuinely satisfying to me	4.69	0.48	16 (100)	4.63	0.72	15 (93.75)				Finalized
I autonomously control the professional activities I engage in	4.38	0.81	13 (81.25)	4.47	0.64	15 (93.75)				Finalized
My professional satisfaction is based on the quality of my work	4.06	0.85	9 (56.25)*	4.13	0.64	10 (62.5)*	4.43	0.73	14 (87.5)	Finalized
Engaging in self-reflection is a positive attribute of my profession	3.88	1.31	12 (75)	3.75	1.44	12 (75)				Finalized
I work in a positive professional environment	3.81	0.83	16 (100)	4.07	0.8	7 (43.75)*	4.12	0.88	11 (68.75)	Not Finalized
Challenges	4.06	0.98		3.91	1.09					
I struggle to deal with my clients' unrealistic expectations	4	0.82	6 (37.5)*	3.38	0.72	14 (87.5)				Finalized
Developing and sustaining my SP career adds strain to my personal life	4.75	0.45	12 (75)	4.6	0.74	14 (87.5)				Finalized
The unusual aspects of my work (i.e., working hours, location) present a challenge to me	4.56	0.73	14 (87.5)	4.56	0.89	14 (87.5)				Finalized
The lack of appreciation from my clients and supervisors affects me	3.75	1.39	12 (75)	4.19	0.91	14 (87.5)				Finalized
I struggle to manage my casework	4.5	0.73	14 (87.5)	4.31	1.01	14 (87.5)				Finalized
It is a challenge to say "no" to work requests	4.25	0.93	14 (87.5)	4.13	1.02	11 (68.75)*	3.94	1.06	14 (87.5)	Finalized
I feel pressured to deliver results with those I work with (i.e., clients, students)	4.19	1.11	12 (75)	4.13	1.15	14 (87.5)				Finalized
I do not have meaningful and genuine relationships with mentors and supervisors	4.38	0.89	14 (87.5)	4.2	1.08	13 (81.25)				Finalized
The financial stability of my work is a concern.	4.5	0.73	14 (87.5)	4.38	0.96	13 (81.25)				Finalized
I struggle to meaningfully engage in my SP career	4.31	0.7	14 (87.5)	4.07	1.33	12 (75)				Finalized
I disregard my personal needs when traveling for work	3.88	1.09	8 (50)*	3.75	1.39	12 (75)				Finalized
The lack of education about the SP profession affects me	3.25	1.29	12 (75)	3.25	1.39	10 (62.5)*	3.12	1.26	12 (75)	Finalized
The lack of opportunities leads to high competitiveness among professionals	3.88	1.2	14 (87.5)	3.25	1.24	8 (50)*	3.12	1.2	12 (75)	Finalized
My personal identities are undermined in my SP work environment	3.38	1.26	9 (56.25)*	3.5	1.21	10 (62.5)*	3.44	0.89	12 (75)	Finalized
I struggle to deal with the politics in my work place	4.13	0.96	12 (75)	4.13	1.02	12 (75)				Finalized
The lack of opportunities limits my professional development	3.94	1	9 (56.25)*	3.69	1.01	10 (62.5)*	3.06	1.29	11 (68.75)	Not Finalized
I am not as good a SP practitioner as most of my colleagues	4.06	1.18	13 (81.25)	3.38	1.2	7 (43.75)*	2.81	1.05	11 (68.75)	Not Finalized
Putting on a variety of 'professional masks' is a challenge of my profession	3.44	1.26	8 (50)*	3.56	1.41	5 (31.25)*	3.62	1.09	10 (62.5)	Not Finalized
Strategies	4.48	0.83		4.4	0.86					
I proactively engage in positive relationships with colleagues outside of work	4.13	1.31	16 (100)	3.87	1.13	8 (50)*	4.06	0.99	15 (93.75)	Finalized
My SP practice is in line with my personal values and beliefs	4.8	0.56	14 (87.5)	4.6	0.63	15 (93.75)				Finalized
I proactively engage in life-long learning to foster my professional development	4.63	0.72	14 (87.5)	4.53	0.92	14 (87.5)				Finalized
I seek work opportunities which allow me to grow as a person	4.5	0.82	14 (87.5)	4.4	0.91	14 (87.5)				Finalized
I strive to only engage in meaningful professional commitments	4.25	1.06	13 (81.25)	4.27	1.22	14 (87.5)				Finalized
I organize my schedule around my preferred professional activities	4.38	1.26	13 (81.25)	4.13	1.26	14 (87.5)				Finalized
I am able to adapt to the different situations I face in my work	4.88	0.34	14 (87.5)	4.8	0.56	14 (87.5)				Finalized
I plan ahead to deal with possible professional challenges	4.63	0.72	14 (87.5)	4.63	0.72	14 (87.5)				Finalized
I cope in an effective manner with professional challenges	4.6	1.06	14 (87.5)	4.87	0.35	14 (87.5)				Finalized
I support other professionals pro-bono as a way to give back to the profession	3.87	1.36	12 (75)	3.6	1.24	9 (56.25)*	4.25	1.06	14 (87.5)	Finalized
I engage in genuine and open relationships with those I work with	4.53	0.92	14 (87.5)	4.47	0.74	14 (87.5)				Finalized
My profession is just a job to me	4.43	0.76	14 (87.5)	4.27	1.16	14 (87.5)				Finalized
I reflect on ways to cope with stressors outside the professions	4.07	1.22	13 (81.25)	4.33	0.9	14 (87.5)				Finalized
I pay sufficient attention to my personal wellbeing	4.8	0.41	13 (81.25)	4.87	0.35	14 (87.5)				Finalized
I rely on my professional competencies to deal with the challenges I encounter	4.5	0.89	12 (75)	4.5	0.82	13 (81.25)				Finalized
I am aware of my limits and boundaries	4.5	0.89	14 (87.5)	4.31	0.95	13 (81.25)				Finalized
I strive to be effective in the unusual professional situations I face	4.06	1	11 (68.75)*	4	1.37	13 (81.25)				Finalized
I refer professional opportunities to sustain a balance	3.93	1.16	14 (87.5)	4.13	0.83	7 (43.75)*	4.19	0.91	13 (81.25)	Finalized

I engage in activities that support my life-work balance	4.87	0.35	14 (87.5)	4.8	0.41	13 (81.25)	Finalized
I maintain positive personal relationships outside of work	4.87	0.35	14 (87.5)	4.73	0.59	13 (81.25)	Finalized
I use my SP knowledge to enhance the quality of my personal life	4.73	0.59	14 (87.5)	4.4	0.83	13 (81.25)	Finalized
I proactively seek feedback from peers	4.69	0.6	13 (81.25)	4.25	1.13	12 (75)	Finalized

Table 5 The finalized survey

Regarding your professional activity as sport psychology professional, or student-in-training, please indicate to what extent the following statements are true in describing your professional experience.

	Very Untrue	Untrue	True	Very True
1. My professional connections with other SP professionals positively contributes to my work	1	2	3	4
2. My profession is genuinely satisfying to me	1	2	3	4
3. I autonomously control the professional activities I engage in	1	2	3	4
4. My professional satisfaction is based on the quality of my work	1	2	3	4
5. Engaging in self-reflection is a positive attribute of my profession	1	2	3	4
6. I struggle to deal with my clients' unrealistic expectations	1	2	3	4
7. Developing and sustaining my SP career adds strain to my personal life	1	2	3	4
8. The unusual aspects of my work (i.e., working hours, location) present a challenge to me	1	2	3	4
9. The lack of appreciation from my clients and supervisors affects me	1	2	3	4
10. I struggle to manage my casework	1	2	3	4
11. It is a challenge to say "no" to work requests	1	2	3	4
12. I feel pressured to deliver results with those I work with (i.e., clients, students)	1	2	3	4
13. I do not have meaningful and genuine relationships with mentors and supervisors	1	2	3	4
14. The financial stability of my work is a concern.	1	2	3	4
15. I struggle to meaningfully engage in my SP career	1	2	3	4
16. I disregard my personal needs when traveling for work	1	2	3	4
17. The lack of education about the SP profession affects me	1	2	3	4
18. The lack of opportunities lead to high competitiveness among professionals	1	2	3	4
19. My personal identities are undermined in my SP work environment	1	2	3	4
20. I struggle to deal with the politics in my work place	1	2	3	4
21. I proactively engage in positive relationships with colleagues outside of work	1	2	3	4
22. My SP practice is in line with my personal values and beliefs	1	2	3	4
23. I proactively engage in life-long learning to foster my professional development	1	2	3	4
24. I seek work opportunities which allow me to grow as a person	1	2	3	4
25. I strive to only engage in meaningful professional commitments	1	2	3	4
26. I organize my schedule around my preferred professional activities	1	2	3	4
27. I am able to adapt to the different situations I face in my work	1	2	3	4
28. I plan ahead to deal with possible professional challenges	1	2	3	4
29. I cope in an effective manner with professional challenges	1	2	3	4
30. I support other professionals pro-bono as a way to give back to the profession	1	2	3	4
31. I engage in genuine and open relationships with those I work with	1	2	3	4
32. My profession is just a job to me	1	2	3	4
33. I reflect on ways to cope with stressors outside the professions	1	2	3	4
34. I pay sufficient attention to my personal wellbeing	1	2	3	4
35. I rely on my professional competencies to deal with the challenges I encounter	1	2	3	4
36. I am aware of my limits and boundaries	1	2	3	4
37. I strive to be effective in the unusual professional situations I face	1	2	3	4
38. I refer professional opportunities to sustain a balance	1	2	3	4
39. I engage in activities that support my life-work balance	1	2	3	4
40. I maintain positive personal relationships outside of work	1	2	3	4
41. I use my SP knowledge to enhance the quality of my personal life	1	2	3	4
42. I proactively seek feedback from peers	1	2	3	4

Multifaceted Meaning of SP-PQL: Average of 1 through 5
Challenges hindering SP-PQL: Average of 6 through 20
Personal and professional strategies to support SP-PQL: Average of 21 through 42

Figure 1. Flow chart of the study design