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"Because I've lived it. I've been in their shoes"

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”Because I’ve lived it. I’ve been in their shoes”: the journey and practices of coaches in a sports-based education programme for disadvantaged adults

Background: Coaches are of paramount importance for achieving personal development sport-based programmes catering to disadvantaged populations. However, our knowledge of how coaches develop others and how they learn to do so is limited in this context.

Objectives: While adopting naturalistic techniques, I aimed to explore a) the life histories which led coaches into the sport-based programme and b) the strategies coaches used to develop others.

Methods: I embraced ethnography in Scotland’s largest soccer-based programme catering for people facing social isolation, mental health issues, homelessness and substance addiction. To achieve this, I engaged in 18 prolonged immersions in the field, observing the practices of coaches, followed by life history interviews with each coach and the logging of a reflexive diary.

Findings & Discussion: A constructivist framework analysis revealed the coaches’ varying traumatic lived experiences, such as substance addiction, poverty and homeless. Despite these adversities, narrative interviewing uncovered how coaches had previously attended this programme as participants and how their experience of trauma was a source of learning for their empathy and caring strategies that they would later adopt. My observations showed how this might manifest with coaches sharing their stories of trauma to those battling the same adversities while also aiming to develop competence by providing wider development opportunities. Through these findings, I share stories of trauma and the development practices of three coaches and argue that both could be connected to support positive outcomes in programmes for disadvantaged populations.