In sport psychology, there is a need to deviate from traditional research methods and move towards a more diverse means of analysing data (Biddle, Markland, Gilbourne, Chatzisarantis, & Sparkes, 2001). Past research into chartered sport physiotherapists’ perceptions about psychological aspects of their work in the UK has included three quantitative surveys (e.g., Hemmings & Povey, 2002) and two qualitative studies (Jevon & Johnston, 2003; McKenna, Delaney, & Phillips, 2002). Despite the gradual growth of literature, thus far no studies have investigated physiotherapists’ personal experiences in using psychological intervention techniques in detail. By using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, 1996) as a method of analysis, this study aimed to gain an insight into their own experiences of utilising psychological techniques with injured athletes.

Seven (4 female, 3 male) chartered physiotherapists working in sports medicine in the United Kingdom participated in the study. A semi-structured interview schedule was devised and it focused on the physiotherapists’ personal experiences of using psychological intervention techniques (e.g., goal-setting, imagery, self-talk, relaxation, social support) in their work.

The IPA analyses revealed several prominent and fascinating themes. Physiotherapists were very open about their lack of formal training in sport psychology, and appeared to be incredibly knowledgeable and comfortable with the use of goal setting. Familiarity with other techniques (i.e., imagery, relaxation, and self-talk) appeared to be less apparent. They also placed great prominence on their ‘gut –feeling’ (an excerpt from transcripts) and experiential knowledge.

The study provides useful insight into physiotherapists’ real-life experiences using psychological interventions. Based on the findings, it can be recommended that further training on a range of techniques would be useful. The usefulness of such training should also be tested and assessed.


Keywords: Sport Psychology, Rehabilitation, Physiotherapy