

ART OF COMMUNICATION: A PREVENTION PROGRAMME

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Introduction

Playing football entails a substantial risk of injury and players should be careful with their health to be able to play without any physical or mental restrictions. Non-contact injuries can best be prevented via thorough warming-up exercises prior to actual gameplay. There is, however, some evidence that indicates that players do not always perceive themselves at risk for football-related injuries. Players mostly assume physical contact is the main reason to get injured. Regarding non-contact injuries, this is suggesting a strong need to increase risk perceptions. That is, theories of human behaviour (e.g. protection motivation theory) propose that people are unlikely to (be motivated to) act when they do not see themselves at risk.

Persuasive risk communication messages are a key instrument to inform the public of positive or negative health consequences in order to enhance the risk perceptions of severity (i.e. how serious is the problem?) and susceptibility (i.e. will the problem happen to me?). There is some evidence that shows that not only content (e.g. risk communication), but also source (e.g. risk communicator) affects the persuasiveness of such messages. Despite this, there is relatively little systematic development and effectiveness testing of persuasive messages that are targeted at enhancing these severity and susceptibility perceptions of non-contact injuries.

In the present study, we investigated this issue in Dutch young adults regarding non-contact injuries via the FIFA11+ warming up program, an extensive warming-up program developed by the FIFA. Evidence suggests that the implementation of the FIFA 11+ warming up has led to significant decreases in injuries during matches and training.

Purpose: To test the effects of four persuasive communication messages on perceptions of severity and susceptibility towards injury prevention in a convenience sample of young adults in the Netherlands.

Methods

The study was done in an online environment, where participants initially provided baseline information on demographics, previous exercise behaviour in the past four weeks, and how often (-2 = never; +2 = always) had performed each of the following warming up exercises: (a) a ten-minute warming up, (b) agility exercises, (c) strength exercises, (d) walking exercises, (e) stability exercises, and (f) coordination exercises. Participants then provided baseline information on the dependent variables severity ("when I do not perform these warming up exercises, the negative consequences of this are (a) severe and (b) serious") and susceptibility ("when I do not perform these warming up exercises, I will suffer from (a) small aches, (b) injuries, (c) pain during my exercise routine, and (d) pain after my exercise routine"). Answering categories ranged from -2 (totally disagree) to +2 (totally agree).

After this, participants were randomly exposed to one of four messages that manipulated outcomes (negative outcomes of not doing warming up behaviours versus positive outcomes of doing warming up behaviours) and source type (celebrity versus non celebrity). Participants were instructed to read the message carefully as they would need to answer questions about the content.

After exposure, a manipulation check for outcomes and source familiarity was performed, after which participants again provided information on severity and susceptibility. The data were analysed in a 2 (type of outcome) x 2 (type of source) univariate analyses of covariance, with age, gender, and baseline values of warming up behaviours and severity and susceptibility as covariates.

Results

For severity, there was a trend effect of type of frame, $F(1, 216) = 2.90, P=0.09, \eta^2=0.01$, and of type of source, $F(1, 216) = 3.26, P=0.07, \eta^2=0.02$, but not of their interaction, $F(1, 216) = 2.01, P=0.16, \eta^2=0.00$. Pairwise comparisons for these trend effects showed that participants in the loss-framed condition reported higher levels of perceived severity ($M=0.87, SE=0.07$) than participants in the gain-framed condition ($M=0.70, SE=0.07$). Similar differences were observed for severity scores in those exposed to a celebrity source ($M=0.88, SE=0.07$) versus those exposed to a non-celebrity source ($M=0.69, SE=0.07$).

For susceptibility, there was no effect of type of frame, $F(1, 216) = 0.23, P=0.631, \eta^2=0.00$, but there were trend effects for type of source, $F(1, 216) = 3.68, P=0.06, \eta^2=0.01$, and the frame x source interaction, $F(1, 216) = 3.10, P=0.08, \eta^2=0.01$. Pairwise comparison for source type showed that participants in the celebrity source condition reported higher level of perceived susceptibility ($M=0.66, SE=0.05$) than participants in the non celebrity source condition ($M=0.51, SE=0.06$). The decomposition of the interaction showed that means for susceptibility were highest in participants who were exposed to a message with negative consequences of not warming up conveyed by a celebrity source ($M=0.75, SE=0.08$), lower in those exposed to a message with positive consequences of warming up conveyed by a celebrity ($M=0.58, SE=0.07$) or non celebrity source ($M=0.56, SE=0.08$), and lowest in those exposed to a message with negative consequences of not warming up conveyed by a non celebrity source ($M=0.47, SE=0.08$).

Conclusion

Our results demonstrate that a persuasive message that highlights negative consequences of not performing warming up behaviours via a celebrity source are effective at enhancing individuals' perceptions of susceptibility with regard to negative consequences (small aches, injuries, and pains during and after one's exercise routine) of not performing warming up behaviours.