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# PLAYING SENIOR INTER-COUNTY GAELIC GAMES

## EXPERIENCES, REALITIES AND CONSEQUENCES

ELISH KELLY, JOANNE BANKS, SEAMUS MCGUINNESS AND  
DOROTHY WATSON



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## GAA FOREWORD

Ardaíonn sé mo chroí an deis seo a bheith agam na focail seo a leanas a scríobh agus fáilte a chur roimh an foilseachán tabhachtach seo.

The commitment required to play our games at the highest level has long been a significant one, and while this has been commonly accepted as part and parcel of our games, this report was commissioned with the intention of basing our thinking and approach in the years ahead on concrete evidence. In that context it is both welcome and timely.

Working with the Gaelic Players Association and the Economic and Social Research Institute, we have produced a thorough and in-depth report that examines in great detail the full extent of what it means to commit to play football and hurling at senior inter-county level. As part of this process we heard directly from current players but also from those who work with them in their respective set-ups.

Our players are wonderful ambassadors for the GAA and an intrinsic part of the success of the organisation, given the linchpin role they occupy at the heart of our games. They are the figures our young people aspire to be, and they are athletes whose skill, dedication and conditioning we all admire.

However, they are also partners, fathers, sons, brothers, friends, with careers and commitments away from the field, and with all of this in mind this study is enlightening.

None of us can be certain what the next decade will hold for our games and indeed our players. Every generation of players holds the view that their commitment is greater than the last, but with the ongoing advances in technology and their knock-on effect on sport, the bar continues to be raised. Similarly, the crossover in habits between sporting codes – some of them full-time – feeds the desire of players who want to be the best they can be.

We are committed to the well-being of our players and we work in partnership with the Gaelic Players Association to ensure that important supports are made available to them over the course of their involvement with our county teams. In an ideal world, attaining the status of an inter-county player should help, not hinder, a person's personal life and professional life.

I sincerely hope that this body of work will inform our engagement with our players in the years ahead, safeguarding their important role within the wider GAA family.

Rath Dé ar an obair,

Seán Ó hÓráin  
Uachtarán  
Cumann Lúthchleas Gael

## **GPA FOREWORD**

Inter-county hurlers and footballers are elite amateur athletes who play for the love of Gaelic games and the love of place. Following the increased commercialisation of Gaelic games in the 1990s and a growing commitment on the part of the players, the GPA was created by players to advance their welfare requirements and protect their interests.

The GPA is now the officially recognised representative body for inter-county hurlers and footballers, providing supports to over 2,200 current county players across 67 playing squads, and a growing number of former players. Support is provided through the provision of freely available Player Development and Welfare Programmes in areas such as Life Skills, Education, Career and Wellbeing.

The games of Gaelic football and hurling have experienced significant evolution in recent years. Our games continue to grow and provide great joy to many supporters at home and abroad. However, while many of our players continue to enjoy the games at the highest level, the commitment required nowadays is extraordinary for amateur players and probably not fully understood by most outside of the dressing room.

Through our extensive regional engagement with players, county managers and medical teams, we are witnessing a change in the attitude of players on issues concerning player welfare. More and more players find themselves under increasing pressure – physical, emotional and financial – due to the exceptional demands being placed on them.

Following the most recent GAA/GPA Recognition Protocol 2017–2019 agreement, both organisations acknowledged that in order to establish the full extent of the demands being placed on senior inter-county players, comprehensive research and analysis was required. That research is contained in this document.

The information in this report should help provide the necessary evidence for both the GAA and GPA to develop measures that will allow Gaelic players to maintain a balance between their needs as club and inter-county players and their personal and professional lives.

On foot of this research and through future engagement with all relevant stakeholders, we must ensure that the playing experience continues to provide enjoyment and fulfilment for all our players and the games realise their true potential. Early in 2019 the GPA and GAA will sit down to again agree a new protocol to chart the next few years of support for inter-county players. The research in this document has pointed to just how important and necessary those supports are.

Seamus Hickey  
Chairman, Gaelic Players Association

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	i
Main Findings.....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
1.1 Context of the research.....	1
1.2 Why does player welfare matter? .....	2
1.3 Objectives of the research.....	2
1.4 Research methodology.....	3
1.5 Structure of the report .....	4
Chapter 2: Gaelic Games and Player Welfare.....	6
2.1 Gaelic games.....	6
2.2 Player welfare.....	10
Chapter 3: Previous Literature on Player Welfare.....	17
3.1 Introduction.....	17
3.2 International literature on player welfare issues.....	17
3.2.1 Player burnout .....	17
3.2.2 Training load and injuries.....	20
3.2.3 Sleep.....	21
3.2.4 Travel.....	23
3.2.5 Work–life balance .....	23
3.2.6 Athletic identity.....	25
3.2.7 Time allocation.....	26
3.3 Gaelic games literature.....	27
Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Data.....	30
4.1 Introduction.....	30
4.2 Research methodology.....	30
4.3 Survey of senior inter-county players 2016 data .....	32
4.4 Analysis approach.....	35
Chapter 5: Commitments Involved in Playing Senior Inter-county Gaelic games.....	38
5.1 Introduction.....	38
5.2 Time and training commitments .....	39
5.2.1 Inter-county training.....	39
5.2.2 Individually instigated training .....	44
5.2.3 Other Gaelic team training .....	46

5.3	Championship season field-based training day.....	47
5.3.1	Overview .....	47
5.3.2	Duration of inter-county field-based training sessions.....	52
5.3.3	Time allocated to professional commitments .....	54
5.3.4	Time allocated to family, partner, friends, relaxing, other activities.....	56
5.3.5	Time allocated to sleep .....	57
5.4	The number of Gaelic teams players were involved with during 2016.....	58
5.5	Time commitments across the 2016 playing seasons .....	59
5.6	Time off from Gaelic games during 2016 .....	61
5.7	Levels of satisfaction with training to game ratio during the 2016 gaelic seasons.....	65
5.7.1	Pre-season.....	65
5.7.2	National league .....	65
5.7.3	Championship .....	66
Chapter 6: Effects of Playing Senior Inter-county Gaelic Games.....		68
6.1	Introduction.....	68
6.2	Incidence and effects of Injuries .....	68
6.3	Playing and/or training when injured.....	71
6.4	Senior inter-county players' well-being .....	77
6.5	Players' views on the effects of their inter-county commitments.....	83
6.5.1	Time .....	83
6.5.2	Downsides.....	85
6.5.3	Other aspects of playing senior inter-county .....	88
6.6	Benefits of becoming an inter-county player.....	90
6.7	Most important aspects of inter-county experience.....	91
6.8	Drop-out from senior inter-county.....	92
Chapter 7: Effects of Playing Senior Inter-county on Players' Club Involvement.....		98
7.1	Introduction.....	98
7.2	Players' experiences of playing both inter-county and club .....	98
7.3	Players' views on amount of time spent with club and county teams during 2016 season.....	103
7.4	Players' views on spending more time with their club .....	106
Chapter 8: Main Research Findings and Implications for Senior Inter-county Players' Welfare.....		108
8.1	Introduction.....	108
8.2	Findings and player welfare implications .....	109
8.2.1	Time commitments .....	109
8.2.2	Sports conditioning .....	109



8.2.3	Travel.....	110
8.2.4	Personal relationships and general downtime .....	110
8.2.5	Sleep.....	111
8.2.6	Professional commitments .....	111
8.2.7	Multiple Gaelic game team involvement.....	112
8.2.8	Injuries.....	113
8.2.9	Well-being and mental health .....	114
8.2.10	Off-season .....	115
8.2.11	Relationship between club and county .....	116
8.2.12	Positive aspects of playing senior inter-county .....	116
8.3	Future work .....	117
8.4	Concluding remarks.....	117
References .....		120
Appendix A: Chapter 2 supplementary work.....		128
A.1	Summary of current GAA player welfare and games development policies and resources.....	128
A.2	GPA player development programmes participation numbers: 2010–end 2017 .....	129
A.3	Summary of GPA player welfare measures pursued and/or implemented over the years.....	130
Appendix B: Chapter 4 Supplementary Work.....		132
B.1	Summary of Games Development Officer workshop.....	132
B.2	Summary of senior inter-county player workshops .....	134
B.3	Responses rates by code and playing level .....	155
B.4	SSICP-2016 questionnaire item non-response .....	155
B.5	2016 national league football teams and championship cup hurling teams .....	158
Appendix C: Chapter 5 Supplementary Work.....		160
C.1	Twenty-four hour field-based training day analysis: data checks and restrictions.....	160
C.1.1	Calculation of the time allocated to an organised inter-county ‘field-based’ training session .....	160
C.1.2	Calculation of the time allocated to travelling to and from an organised inter-county ‘field-based’ training session .....	161
C.1.3	Calculation of the time allocated to food and gear preparation on an organised inter-county ‘field-based’ training session .....	161
C.1.4	Calculation of the time allocated to professional commitments on an organised inter-county ‘field-based’ training session .....	162
C.1.5	Calculation of the time allocated to ‘other’ commitments on an organised inter-county ‘field-based’ training session .....	163

C.1.6	Calculation of the time allocated to sleep on an organised inter-county ‘field-based’ training session .....	164
C.2	Non-field-based sports conditioning training day analysis: data checks and restrictions ..	165
C.2.1	Calculation of the time allocated to travelling to and from an organised inter-county ‘non-field-based’ sports conditioning training session.....	165
C.2.2	Calculation of the time allocated to an organised inter-county ‘non-field-based’ sports conditioning training session during a championship ‘match week’ and a ‘non-match week’ ..	166
C.3	Examination of the number of senior inter-county training sessions during the 2016 championship.....	167
C.3.1	Identification of the number of field-based training sessions during an inter-county championship match week .....	167
C.3.2	Identification of the number of non-field-based sports conditioning training sessions during an inter-county championship match week.....	168
C.3.3	Identification of the number of field-based training sessions during an inter-county championship non-match week.....	169
C.3.4	Identification of the number of non-field-based sports conditioning training sessions during an inter-county championship non-match week .....	169
C.4	Examination of the number of training sessions and/or games with ‘other Gaelic teams’ during the 2016 senior inter-county championship .....	170
C.4.1	Identification of the number of training sessions and/or games with other Gaelic teams during an inter-county championship match week .....	170
C.4.2	Identification of the number of training sessions and/or games with other Gaelic teams during an inter-county championship non-match week.....	171
C.4.3	Calculation of the duration of other Gaelic teams’ training sessions and/or games during an inter-county championship match week.....	172
C.4.4	Calculation of the duration of other Gaelic teams’ training sessions and/or games during an inter-county championship non-match week .....	173
C.5	Examination of the number of ‘individually instigated’ training sessions during the 2016 senior inter-county championship.....	174
C.5.1	Identification of the number of individually instigated training sessions during an inter-county championship match week .....	174
C.5.2	Identification of the number of individually instigated training sessions during an inter-county championship non-match week.....	174
C.5.3	Calculation of the duration of individually instigated training sessions during an inter-county championship match week .....	175
C.5.4	Calculation of the duration of individually instigated training sessions during an inter-county championship non-match week.....	176
C.6	Examination of time spent travelling to and from a senior inter-county field-based training session.....	177

C.7	Examination of time devoted to food and gear preparation on a senior inter-county field-based training day.....	179
C.8	Examination of the duration of sports conditioning training among 2016 senior players .	179
C.9	Examination of time spent travelling to and from senior inter-county sports conditioning training sessions.....	184
C.10	Examination of the number of organised inter-county training sessions undertaken by 2016 senior players.....	188
C.11	Examination of individually instigated training sessions undertaken by 2016 senior inter-county players.....	196
C.12	Examination of training sessions/games with other Gaelic teams undertaken by 2016 players during the senior inter-county championship.....	202
C.13	24-hour time allocation on a weekday field-based training day during the 2016 championship (late May/June) .....	209
C.14	Breakdown of the number of hours devoted to an inter-county field-based training session during the 2016 championship (late may/june) .....	211
C.15	Examination of time devoted to family, partner, friends, relaxing on an inter-county field-based training day.....	211
C.16	Examination of time devoted to sleep on an inter-county field-based training day .....	212
C.17	Examination of time commitments across the 2016 Gaelic seasons: pre-season, national league and championship .....	213
C.18	Examination of time off from Gaelic Games during the 2016 season .....	215
C.19	Levels of satisfaction with training to game ratio during the 2016 Gaelic seasons: pre-season, national league and championship.....	216
Appendix D: Chapter 6 supplementary work.....		221
D.1	Examination of the incidence and effects of injuries among 2016 senior inter-county players.....	221
D.2	Playing and/or training when injured among 2016 senior inter-county players .....	223
D.3	Pressure to play when injured, medication and final decision-maker .....	229
D.4	Well-being among 2016 senior inter-county players.....	230
D.5	2016 senior inter-county players' views on the effects of inter-county commitments.....	234
D.6	Benefits of becoming an inter-county player from a club player only for 2016 senior inter-county players.....	241
D.7	Most important aspects of inter-county experience for 2016 senior inter-county players .....	245
D.8	Drop-out from senior inter-county.....	249
Appendix E: Chapter 7 Supplementary Work .....		251
E.1	2016 senior inter-county players' experience of playing both inter-county and club.....	251

E.2	2016 senior inter-county players' views on amount of time spent with club team compared with inter-county team during the 2016 season .....	256
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## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1	Survey of senior inter-county players 2016 (SSICP-2016): questionnaire response overview .....	34
Table 4.2	Survey of senior inter-county players 2016 (SSICP-2016) questionnaire response overview: players who ceased playing at the end of 2016 season.....	35
Table 5.1	2016 players' inter-county training time commitments during the 2016 championship (late May/June) .....	40
Table 5.2	Average number of senior inter-county training sessions during the 2016 championship .....	42
Table 5.3	2016 players' average weekly inter-county training time commitments during the 2016 championship (Late May/June).....	44
Table 5.4	2016 players' average weekly individually instigated training session time commitments during the 2016 championship.....	45
Table 5.5	2016 players' average weekly inter-county and individually-instigated training session time commitments during the 2016 championship .....	46
Table 5.6	2016 players' average weekly other Gaelic team training session time commitments during the 2016 championship .....	46
Table 5.7	Number of hours devoted to inter-county field-based Gaelic football training session: 2016 players by playing level .....	53
Table 5.8	Number of hours devoted to an inter-county field-based hurling training session: 2016 players by playing level .....	54
Table 5.9	Number of hours allocated to professional commitments by 2016 Gaelic footballers on a field-based training day: overall and level .....	55
Table 5.10	Number of hours allocated to professional commitments by 2016 hurlers on a field-based training day: overall and level .....	55
Table 5.11	Number of teams played with during the 2016 season: 2016 senior inter-county players .....	59
Table 6.1	WHO-5 statements 'most to all of the time' responses: 2016 players compared to the general population in Ireland.....	79
Table 6.2	Main downsides of playing inter-county: 2016 players: overall and age group.....	86
Table 6.3	Ceased / reduced involvement in non-inter-county activities as a result of becoming an inter-county player from a club player only: 2016 players.....	87

Table 6.4	Ceased / reduced involvement in non-inter-county activities as a result of becoming an inter-county player from club player only and it currently bothers me: 2016 players – age group (per cent).....	87
Table B.2.1	Senior inter-county player workshop attendee information: 2016 players.....	134
Table B.3.1	Survey of senior inter-county players 2016 (SSICP-2016) questionnaire response overview: code and national division/championship breakdown.....	155
Table B.4.1	SSICP-2016 questionnaire variables: item non-response .....	155
Table B.5.1	2016 national league football teams .....	158
Table B.5.2	2016 championship cup hurling teams .....	158
Table C.6.1	Breakdown in the number of hours spent travelling to and from an inter-county field-based training session: overall and age group.....	178
Table C.7.1	Breakdown in the number of hours devoted to gear and/or food preparation on an inter-county field-based training day: overall and code.....	179
Table C.8.1	Average duration of an organised inter-county sports conditioning training session during the 2016 championship: age, code and playing level (hours) .....	180
Table C.8.2	Number of hours allocated by 2016 Gaelic footballers to an organised inter-county sports conditioning training session during a championship match week: overall and playing level .....	181
Table C.8.3	Number of hours allocated by 2016 hurlers to an organised inter-county sports conditioning training session during a championship match week: overall and playing level.....	182
Table C.8.4	Number of hours allocated by 2016 Gaelic footballers to an organised inter-county sports conditioning training session during a championship non-match week: overall and playing level .....	183
Table C.8.5	Breakdown in the number of hours allocated by a hurler to an organised inter-county sports conditioning training session during a 2016 championship ‘non-match week’: overall and level.....	183
Table C.9.1	Average time spent travelling to and from organised inter-county field-based and sports conditioning training sessions during the 2016 championship: 2016 players – age and playing level (hours).....	188
Table C.9.2	Breakdown in the number of hours spent travelling to and from an inter-county sports conditioning training session: 2016 players – overall and age group.....	188
Table C.13.1	2016 senior inter-county Gaelic footballers: overall and level (hours).....	209
Table C.13.2	2016 senior inter-county hurlers: overall and level (hours).....	210

Table C.13.3	2016 senior inter-county Gaelic players: overall and age category (hours) .....	210
Table D.5.1	Main downsides of playing senior inter-county for 2016 Gaelic footballers.....	235
Table D.5.2	Main downsides of playing senior inter-county for 2016 hurlers.....	236
Table D.5.3	2016 senior inter-county players' views on 'Too much effort is demanded of us as players': playing level.....	237
Table D.5.4	2016 senior inter-county players' views on 'Working conditions of paid job need to be flexible to enable me to play inter-county': playing level.....	238
Table D.5.5	2016 senior inter-county players' views on 'I have to watch my behaviour in public': playing level .....	239
Table D.5.6	2016 senior inter-county players' views on 'I enjoy taking part in voluntary activities that promote Gaelic games': playing level .....	240
Table D.5.7	2016 senior inter-county players' views on 'I am glad i made the choice to play inter-county': playing level .....	241
Table E.1.1	2016 senior inter-county players' view on 'My club manager and management team expect too much from me when I return from inter-county duties to play with my club': code and playing level.....	252
Table E.1.2	2016 senior inter-county players' view on 'My club teammates are resentful towards me when I return to play for the club after inter-county duties': code and playing level .....	253
Table E.1.3	2016 senior inter-county players' view on 'My club is proud that I represent the club on the county team': code and playing level (per cent) .....	253
Table E.1.4	2016 senior inter-county players' view on 'My inter-county commitments prevent me from socialising with my club teammates': code and playing level .....	254
Table E.1.5	2016 senior inter-county players' view on 'My club management team is understanding when my inter-county commitments restrict me from participating in club training/matches': code and playing level.....	254
Table E.1.6	2016 senior inter-county players' view on 'There is a respectful understanding, and good communication, between my club and county management teams regarding my availability to participate for both teams': code and playing level.....	255

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 5.1	2016 senior inter-county players' 24-hour time allocation on a championship field-based training day.....	48
Figure 5.2	2016 senior inter-county players' 24-hour time allocation during a championship field-based training day: percentage breakdown .....	50
Figure 5.3	2016 senior inter-county players' 24-hour time allocation on a championship field-based training day: players' residency.....	50
Figure 5.4	2016 senior inter-county players' 24-hour time allocation during a championship field-based training day: percentage breakdown based on players' residence .....	51
Figure 5.5	2016 senior inter-county players' 24-hour time allocation during a championship field-based training day: age group.....	52
Figure 5.6	Number of hours devoted to an inter-county field-based training session: 2016 players .....	53
Figure 5.7	Number of hours allocated to professional commitments on a field-based training day: 2016 players.....	54
Figure 5.8	Breakdown of the number of hours allocated to professional commitments on an inter-county field-based training day: overall and age.....	56
Figure 5.9	Numbers of hours allocated to family, partner, friends, relaxing on a field-based training day: 2016 players.....	56
Figure 5.10	Numbers of hours allocated to family, partner, friends, relaxing on a field-based training day: 2016 players – overall and age group.....	57
Figure 5.11	Number of hours allocated to sleep on a field-based training day: 2016 players.....	58
Figure 5.12	Number of hours allocated to sleep on a field-based training day: 2016 players – overall and age group .....	58
Figure 5.13	Time spent by 2016 players on inter-county commitments during the pre-season compared to the championship: overall and code .....	60
Figure 5.14	Time spent by 2016 players on inter-county commitments during the national league compared to the championship: overall and code .....	61
Figure 5.15	Time off from Gaelic games between January and December 2016: overall & code ..	62
Figure 5.16	Time off from Gaelic games between January and December 2016: overall & age group .....	62
Figure 5.17	Average amount of time off from Gaelic games between January and December 2016: overall and code (number of weeks) .....	63



Figure 5.18	Average amount of time off from Gaelic games between January and December 2016: hurlers (number of weeks).....	63
Figure 5.19	Average amount of time off from Gaelic games between January and December 2016: Gaelic footballers (number of weeks).....	64
Figure 5.20	Average amount of time off from Gaelic games between January and December 2016: overall and age group (number of weeks).....	64
Figure 5.21	Levels of satisfaction with the training to game ratio during the 2016 pre-season: overall and code.....	65
Figure 5.22	Levels of satisfaction with the training to game ratio during the 2016 national league: overall and code.....	66
Figure 5.23	Levels of satisfaction with the training to game ratio during the 2016 championship: overall and code.....	67
Figure 6.1	Injury during 2016 season: overall and code.....	69
Figure 6.2	Injury during 2016 season: overall and sleep duration.....	69
Figure 6.3	Duration absent from training and/or playing due to injury during the 2016 season: overall.....	70
Figure 6.4	Duration absent from work/college due to injury during the 2016 season: overall ....	70
Figure 6.5	Frequency of playing inter-county or club matches when injured: 2016 players – overall .....	71
Figure 6.6	Frequency of training with inter-county or club team when injured: 2016 players – overall (per cent).....	72
Figure 6.7	Felt pressurised to play inter-county game when injured: 2016 players – overall and code.....	72
Figure 6.8	Received medication to play inter-county match when injured: 2016 players – overall and code.....	73
Figure 6.9	Received medication to play inter-county match when injured: 2016 hurlers .....	74
Figure 6.10	Received medication to play inter-county match when injured: 2016 footballers.....	74
Figure 6.11	Received medication to play club match when injured: 2016 players – overall and code .....	75
Figure 6.12	Received medication to play club match when injured: 2016 footballers .....	76
Figure 6.13	Received medication to play club match when injured: 2016 hurlers .....	76
Figure 6.14	Final decision maker on playing inter-county match when injured: 2016 players – overall.....	77

Figure 6.15	WHO-5 Mental Well-Being Index: 2016 players – overall and code (score).....	78
Figure 6.16	Life satisfaction: 2016 players – overall and code (average).....	81
Figure 6.17	Individual that players would feel comfortable approaching if they had emotional or mental health difficulty: 2016 players – overall .....	82
Figure 6.18	Individual that players would feel comfortable approaching if they had emotional or mental health difficulty: 2016 players – code.....	82
Figure 6.19	Senior inter-county training, playing and related commitments take up a large amount of time: 2016 players – overall and code.....	83
Figure 6.20	Other life areas players would like to spend more time on: 2016 players – overall ....	84
Figure 6.21	Other life areas players would like to spend more time on: 2016 players – age group... ..	85
Figure 6.22	‘Too much effort is demanded of us as players’: 2016 Players .....	88
Figure 6.23	‘Working conditions of paid job need to be flexible to enable me to play inter-county’: 2016 players .....	89
Figure 6.24	‘I have to watch my behaviour in public’: 2016 players .....	89
Figure 6.25	‘I enjoy taking part in voluntary activities that promote gaelic games’: 2016 players	90
Figure 6.26	‘I am glad I made the choice to play inter-county’: 2016 players.....	90
Figure 6.27	Benefits of becoming an inter-county player from a club player only: 2016 players – overall.....	91
Figure 6.28	Three most important aspects of inter-county experience: 2016 players – overall ....	92
Figure 6.29	2016 players no longer playing senior inter-county in 2017: age group .....	93
Figure 6.30	Main reasons why 2016 players ceased playing senior inter-county in 2017: overall .	94
Figure 6.31	Main reasons why 2016 players ceased playing senior inter-county in 2017: age group .....	96
Figure 7.1	‘Playing for my club team has played a big role in my development as a gaelic player’: 2016 players .....	99
Figure 7.2	‘My club manager and management team expect too much from me when I return from inter-county duties to play with my club’: 2016 players .....	100
Figure 7.3	‘My club is proud that I represent the club on the county team’: 2016 players .....	100
Figure 7.4	‘My inter-county commitments prevent me from socialising with my club teammates’: 2016 players.....	101

Figure 7.5	‘My club teammates are resentful towards me when I return to play for the club after inter-county duties’: 2016 players.....	102
Figure 7.6	‘My club management team is understanding when my inter-county commitments restrict me from participating in club training/matches’: 2016 players.....	102
Figure 7.7	‘There is a respectful understanding, and good communication, between my club and county management teams regarding my availability to participate for both teams’: 2016 players.....	103
Figure 7.8	Players’ view on amount of time spent with club and county teams during the pre-season: 2016 players – overall and code .....	104
Figure 7.9	Players’ view on amount of time spent with club and county teams during the national league: 2016 players – overall and code.....	105
Figure 7.10	Players’ view on amount of time spent with club and county teams during the championship: 2016 players – overall and code.....	106
Figure 7.11	Not willing to spend more time with club if at a cost to players’ personal inter-county success: 2016 players – overall and code .....	107
Figure C.6.1	Number of hours spent travelling to and from an inter-county field-based training session: overall and code .....	178
Figure C.8.1	Number of hours allocated to an organised inter-county sports conditioning training session during a championship match week: 2016 players.....	181
Figure C.8.2	Number of hours allocated to an organised inter-county sports conditioning training session during a championship match week: 2016 players – overall and age group.	182
Figure C.8.3	Number of hours allocated to an organised inter-county sports conditioning training session during a championship non-match week: 2016 players .....	183
Figure C.8.4	Number of hours allocated to an organised inter-county sports conditioning training session during a championship non-match week: 2016 players – overall and age group .....	184
Figure C.9.1	Average number of hours spent travelling to and from organised inter-county field-based and sports conditioning training sessions during the championship: 2016 players – overall and players’ residence .....	185
Figure C.9.2	Number of hours spent travelling to and from organised inter-county field-based and sports conditioning training sessions: 2016 players resident outside of home county .....	186
Figure C.9.3	Number of hours spent travelling to and from organised inter-county field-based and sports conditioning training sessions: 2016 players resident in home county.....	187

Figure C.9.4	Average number of hours spent travelling to and from organised inter-county field-based and sports conditioning training sessions during the 2016 championship: 2016 players – overall and code .....	187
Figure C.10.1	Number of field-based training sessions for 2016 Gaelic footballers during a championship match week: overall and level.....	190
Figure C.10.2	Number of field-based training sessions for 2016 hurlers during a championship match week: overall and level .....	190
Figure C.10.3	Number of sports conditioning training sessions for 2016 Gaelic footballers during a championship match week: overall and level.....	191
Figure C.10.4	Number of sports conditioning training sessions for 2016 hurlers during a championship match week: overall and level .....	192
Figure C.10.5	Number of field-based training sessions for 2016 footballers during a championship non-match week: overall and level.....	193
Figure C.10.6	Number of field-based training sessions for 2016 hurlers during a championship non-match week: overall and level .....	194
Figure C.10.7	Number of sports conditioning training sessions for Gaelic footballers during a 2016 championship non-match week: overall and level .....	195
Figure C.10.8	Number of sports conditioning training sessions for hurlers during a 2016 championship non-match week: overall and level.....	196
Figure C.11.1	Number of individually instigated training sessions during a 2016 senior inter-county championship match week: overall and code .....	197
Figure C.11.2	Number of individually instigated training sessions during a 2016 senior inter-county championship match week: hurlers.....	197
Figure C.11.3	Number of individually instigated training sessions during a 2016 senior inter-county championship match week: Gaelic footballers.....	198
Figure C.11.4	Number of individually instigated training sessions during a 2016 senior inter-county championship non-match week: overall and code.....	199
Figure C.11.5	Number of individually instigated training sessions during a 2016 senior inter-county championship non-match week: hurlers .....	200
Figure C.11.6	Number of individually instigated training sessions during a 2016 senior inter-county championship non-match week: Gaelic footballers .....	200
Figure C.11.7	Breakdown of the number of hours allocated to an individually instigated training session during a 2016 inter-county championship match week: overall and code....	201

Figure C.11.8	Breakdown of the number of hours allocated to an individually instigated training session during a 2016 inter-county championship non-match week: overall and code .. .....	202
Figure C.12.1	Number of training sessions/games with other Gaelic teams during a 2016 senior inter-county championship match week: overall and code .....	203
Figure C.12.2	Number of training sessions/games with other Gaelic teams during a 2016 senior inter-county championship match week: hurlers.....	203
Figure C.12.3	Number of training sessions/games with other Gaelic teams during a 2016 senior inter-county championship match week: Gaelic footballers.....	204
Figure C.12.4	Number of training sessions/games with other Gaelic teams during a 2016 senior inter-county championship non-match week: overall and code.....	205
Figure C.12.5	Number of training sessions/games with other Gaelic teams during a 2016 senior inter-county championship match week: hurlers.....	205
Figure C.12.6	Number of training sessions/games with other Gaelic teams during a 2016 senior inter-county championship match week: Gaelic footballers.....	206
Figure C.12.7	Duration of training sessions/games with other Gaelic teams during the 2016 senior inter-county championship: overall and code .....	207
Figure C.12.8	Duration of training sessions/games with other Gaelic teams during the 2016 senior inter-county championship: overall and players' residence.....	207
Figure C.12.9	Breakdown of the number of hours allocated to training sessions/games with other Gaelic teams during a 2016 senior inter-county championship match week: overall and code .....	208
Figure C.12.10	Breakdown of the number of hours allocated to training sessions/games with other Gaelic teams during a 2016 senior inter-county championship non-match week: overall and code .....	209
Figure C.14.1	Number of hours devoted to an inter-county field-based training session: overall and age group .....	211
Figure C.15.1	Number of hours 2016 players allocated to family, partner, friends, relaxing on a field-based training day: overall and code.....	211
Figure C.16.1	Number of hours allocated to sleep by 2016 Gaelic footballers on a field-based training day: overall and playing level.....	212
Figure C.16.2	Number of hours allocated to sleep by 2016 hurlers on a field-based training day: overall and playing level.....	212
Figure C.17.1	Time spent by 2016 senior inter-county players on inter-county commitments during the pre-season compared to the championship: Gaelic footballers .....	213

Figure C.17.2	Time spent by 2016 senior inter-county players on inter-county commitments during the pre-season compared to the championship: hurlers .....	213
Figure C.17.3	Time spent by 2016 senior inter-county players on inter-county commitments during the national league compared to the championship: Gaelic footballers .....	214
Figure C.17.4	Time spent by 2016 senior inter-county players on inter-county commitments during the national league compared to the championship: hurlers .....	214
Figure C.18.1	Time off from Gaelic games between January and December 2016: Gaelic footballers . .....	215
Figure C.18.2	Time off from Gaelic Games between January and December 2016: hurlers (per cent). .....	215
Figure C.19.1	Levels of satisfaction with the training to game ratio during the 2016 pre-season: Gaelic footballers .....	216
Figure C.19.2	Levels of satisfaction with the training to game ratio during the 2016 pre-season: hurlers .....	216
Figure C.19.3	Levels of satisfaction with the training to game ratio during the 2016 pre-season: overall and age group .....	217
Figure C.19.4	Levels of satisfaction with the training to game ratio during the 2016 national league: Gaelic footballers .....	217
Figure C.19.5	Levels of satisfaction with the training to game ratio during the 2016 national league: hurlers .....	218
Figure C.19.6	Levels of satisfaction with the training to game ratio during the 2016 national league: overall and age group .....	218
Figure C.19.7	Levels of satisfaction with the training to game ratio during the 2016 championship: Gaelic footballers .....	219
Figure C.19.8	Levels of satisfaction with the training to game ratio during the 2016 championship: hurlers .....	219
Figure C.19.9	Levels of satisfaction with the training to game ratio during the 2016 championship: overall and age group .....	220
Figure D.1.1	Injury during 2016 season: 2016 Gaelic footballers .....	221
Figure D.1.2	Injury during 2016 Season: 2016 hurlers .....	221
Figure D.1.3	Injury during 2016 season: overall and age group.....	222
Figure D.1.4	Duration absent from training and/or playing due to injury during the 2016 season: 2016 players – code .....	222

Figure D.1.5	Duration Absent from work/college due to injury during the 2016 season: 2016 players – code.....	223
Figure D.2.1	Frequency of playing inter-county matches when injured among 2016 players: code ... ..	223
Figure D.2.2	Frequency of playing club matches when injured among 2016 players: code.....	224
Figure D.2.3	Frequency of playing senior inter-county matches when injured among 2016 Gaelic footballers .....	224
Figure D.2.4	Frequency of playing senior inter-county matches when injured among 2016 hurlers... ..	225
Figure D.2.5	Frequency of playing club matches when injured among 2016 senior inter-county Gaelic footballers .....	225
Figure D.2.6	Frequency of playing club matches when injured among 2016 senior inter-county hurlers .....	226
Figure D.2.7	Frequency of training with inter-county team when injured among 2016 senior inter-county players: code .....	226
Figure D.2.8	Frequency of training with club team when injured among 2016 senior inter-county players: code .....	227
Figure D.2.9	Frequency of training with inter-county team when injured among 2016 senior inter-county Gaelic footballers .....	227
Figure D.2.10	Frequency of training with inter-county team when injured among 2016 senior inter-county hurlers .....	228
Figure D.2.11	Frequency of training with club team when injured among 2016 senior inter-county Gaelic Footballers) .....	228
Figure D.2.12	Frequency of training with club team when injured among 2016 senior inter-county hurlers .....	229
Figure D.3.1	Felt pressurised to play senior inter-county game when injured among 2016 players: overall and age group .....	229
Figure D.3.2	Final decision maker on playing senior inter-county match when injured: 2016 players – overall and code.....	230
Figure D.4.1	World Health Organisation-5 Well-Being Index (WHO-5) for 2016 senior inter-county footballers: overall and playing level .....	230
Figure D.4.2	World Health Organisation-5 Well-Being Index (WHO-5) for 2016 senior inter-county hurlers: overall and playing level .....	231

Figure D.4.3	World Health Organisation-5 Well-Being Index (WHO-5) for 2016 senior inter-county players: overall and age group.....	231
Figure D.4.4	Life satisfaction among 2016 senior inter-county players: age group (average) .....	232
Figure D.4.5	Person 2016 senior inter-county Gaelic footballers would feel comfortable approaching if had emotional or mental health difficulty.....	232
Figure D.4.6	Person 2016 senior inter-county hurlers would feel comfortable approaching if had emotional or mental health difficulty.....	233
Figure D.5.1	Senior inter-county training, playing and related commitments take up a large amount of 2016 players' time: Gaelic footballers .....	234
Figure D.5.2	Senior inter-county training, playing and related commitments take up a large amount of 2016 players' time: hurlers .....	234
Figure D.5.3	Other life areas 2016 senior inter-county players would like to spend more time on: code (per cent).....	235
Figure D.5.4	2016 senior inter-county players' views on 'Too much effort is demanded of us as players': code .....	236
Figure D.5.5	2016 senior inter-county players' views on 'Working conditions of paid job need to be flexible to enable me to play inter-county': code.....	237
Figure D.5.6	2016 senior inter-county players' views on 'I have to watch my behaviour in public': code.....	238
Figure D.5.7	2016 senior inter-county players' views on 'I enjoy taking part in voluntary activities that promote Gaelic games': code.....	239
Figure D.5.8	2016 senior inter-county players' views on 'I am glad I made the choice to play inter-county': code.....	240
Figure D.6.1	2016 senior inter-county players' views on the benefits of becoming an inter-county player from a club player only: code .....	241
Figure D.6.2	2016 senior inter-county Gaelic footballers' views on the benefits of becoming an inter-county player from a club player only: playing level .....	242
Figure D.6.3	2016 senior inter-county hurlers' views on the benefits of becoming an inter-county player from a club player only: playing level .....	243
Figure D.6.4	2016 senior inter-county players' views on the benefits of becoming an inter-county player from a club player only: age group .....	244
Figure D.7.1	Most Important aspects of inter-county experience for 2016 players: code .....	245
Figure D.7.2	Most important aspects of inter-county experience for 2016 Gaelic footballers: playing level .....	246



Figure D.7.3	Most important aspects of inter-county experience for 2016 hurlers: playing level	247
Figure D.7.4	Most important aspects of inter-county experience for 2016 players: age group	.... 248
Figure D.8.1	2016 Gaelic footballers no longer playing senior inter-county in 2017: playing level	249
Figure D.8.2	2016 hurlers no longer playing senior inter-county in 2017: playing level	..... 249
Figure D.8.3	Main reasons why 2016 players did not play senior inter-county in 2017: code	..... 250
Figure E.1.1	2016 senior inter-county players' view on 'Playing for my club team has played a big role in my development as a Gaelic player': code	..... 251
Figure E.1.2	2016 senior inter-county hurlers' view on 'Playing for my club team has played a big role in my development as a Gaelic player': playing level	..... 251
Figure E.1.3	2016 senior inter-county footballers' view on 'Playing for my club team has played a big role in my development as a Gaelic player': playing level	..... 252
Figure E.2.1	2016 senior inter-county footballers' view on amount of time spent with club team compared with county team during the 2016 pre-season: playing level	..... 256
Figure E.2.2	2016 senior inter-county hurlers' view on amount of time spent with club team compared with county team during the 2016 pre-season: playing level	..... 257
Figure E.2.3	2016 senior inter-county footballers' view on amount of time spent with club team compared with county team during the 2016 national league: playing level	..... 257
Figure E.2.4	2016 senior inter-county hurlers' view on amount of time spent with club team compared with county team during the 2016 national league: playing level	..... 258
Figure E.2.5	2016 senior inter-county footballers' view on amount of time spent with club team compared with county team during the 2016 championship: playing level	..... 258
Figure E.2.6	2016 senior inter-county hurlers' view on amount of time spent with club team compared with county team during the 2016 championship: playing level	..... 259
Figure E.2.7	2016 senior inter-county footballers' view on whether they would want to spend more time with their club if it was at a cost to their personal inter-county success: playing level	..... 259
Figure E.2.8	2016 senior inter-county hurlers' view on whether they would want to spend more time with their club if it was at a cost to their personal inter-county success: playing level	..... 260

## ABBREVIATIONS

AFL	Australian Football League
AIS	Australian Institute of Sport
AGM	Annual General Meeting
AUDIT	Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test
B&A	Behaviour & Attitudes
CAI	Camogie Association of Ireland
CMD	Common Mental Disorders
CPA	Club Players Association
CSO	Central Statistics Office
EQLS	European Quality of Life Survey
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GDO	Games Development Officer
GEES	Government Eligible Expenses Scheme
GOALS	Growth, Opportunities, Aspirations and Learning of Students in College
GPA	Gaelic Players Association
GPS	Global Positioning System
HCP	Healthy Club Project
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HSE	Health Service Executive
IC	Inter-County
LGFA	Ladies Gaelic Football Association
LSP	Local Sports Partnership
MSWC	Medical, Scientific and Welfare Committee
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletics Association
NSC	National Scheme Committee
PDP	Player Development Programme
PES	Principal Economic Status
SI	Sport Ireland
SSICP	Survey of Senior Inter-County Players
SUSI	Student Universal Support Ireland

TL	Training Load
TUEs	Therapeutic Use Exemptions
UCD	University College Dublin
UK	United Kingdom
WADA	World Anti-Doping Agency
WGPA	Women Gaelic Players Association
WHO-5	World Health Organisation-Five Well-Being Index

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### RESEARCH CONTEXT AND APPROACH

Given the developments that have taken place in Gaelic games over the past decade, particularly at the senior inter-county level, there is a concern that the demands that today's games are placing on players are having negative effects on their lives. The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and the Gaelic Players Association (GPA) have introduced a number of measures to ensure that players' needs are taken care of and that those who play enjoy their experience. Nevertheless, questions continue to be raised. Given this, the GAA and GPA jointly commissioned the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to conduct an independent examination of the commitment required to play senior inter-county, and the impact that this has on players' personal and professional lives and club involvement.

The research was primarily conducted through senior inter-county player workshops and a survey of 2016 players. Workshops were also conducted with 2016 senior inter-county managers, County Board Secretaries and third-level Games Development Officers (GDOs). What follows is a summary of the principal findings arising from the study, consideration of their implications for both player welfare and policy in this area, and some discussion on future directions.

### MAIN FINDINGS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

One of the main commitments required to play senior inter-county is time. On average, during the 2016 championship players allocated just over six hours on a weekday pitch-based training day to their inter-county commitments. On the same day, they devoted 7.9 hours to their professional commitments. Thus, players' inter-county commitments on these days were almost equivalent to them undertaking a second consecutive shift of work.

Per week, players' average inter-county time commitment during the championship varied from 14.5 hours during a match week (field-based training only) to 30.8 hours during a non-match week (field-based and sports conditioning, and individually instigated sessions). These, however, are only baseline measures.

The study shows that one of the major factors in the amount of time required of players over recent years has been the emergence of sports conditioning as a major component of inter-county training. This is adding substantially to players' overall training load and needs to be considered in the design of any policies aimed at preventing injury and/or burnout.

The time taken to travel to and from training sessions is another issue that needs attention. The volume of travel that players are engaging in on a weekly basis is likely to be increasing their risk of injury and/or resulting in suboptimal performance. This is something that county management teams need to be cognisant of when formulating training regimes.

The study highlights that players tend to ring-fence their time allocation to senior inter-county activities by compromising on other aspects of their lives: in particular, time allocated to personal relationships and general downtime. This sacrifice was found to be greater among players aged over 30.

The research indicates that sleep is being compromised. Also, the injury rate was somewhat higher among players who got seven or less hours sleep. In addition, low sleep levels and/or quality may be affecting some players' mental well-being.

At first glance, it appears that players are managing to maintain their professional careers in tandem with playing senior inter-county. Other findings from the study, however, question the ability of players to maintain this balance over the medium to long term.

Players aged 18 to 21 had particularly high levels of overall Gaelic game time commitment during 2016 because the majority played with four or more teams. While changes were made to the club and inter-county minor and U21 grades in 2017/2018 to address the issue of over-activity among this group, the effectiveness of these reforms may be hampered as no modifications have been made to the Higher Education (HE) competition structures. If such changes are not feasible, then consideration needs to be given by college and county management teams to collaborating.

The research revealed that just over half of players sustained an injury while either training or playing with their inter-county team during the 2016 season. It also emerged that a high proportion continued to train/play with their county/club team when injured, with quite a number receiving medication to do so. More research is needed into the long-term implications for players' welfare from such decisions.

2016 players' mental well-being was above the threshold level for being at risk of depression. However, it was somewhat below that of the general population, especially those of similar age. While suboptimal sleep may be contributing to this, some other findings from the research point towards the commitments associated with playing senior inter-county potentially weighing on players' minds.

The study highlighted that 40 per cent of players had no time off from Gaelic games during 2016. While there have been attempts in the past to introduce an off-season, it has never been successfully enforced. Given the findings from this study, there may be more of an appetite on the part of all stakeholders to consider again the introduction of an official off-season and to work together to ensure its successful implementation.

The arrangements between club and county management teams appear somewhat ad-hoc with regard to player welfare. Like with college management teams, there may be grounds for considering a more systemised relationship between club and county managements in order to minimise the time commitments and training load on players.

Despite the very considerable time commitments and knock-on effects for other aspects of players' lives, very few players cited 'too demanding' as their reason for ceasing playing inter-county. In fact, the research revealed that the vast majority were glad that they made the choice to play senior inter-county. In addition, players indicated that they benefited from inter-county participation on a number of fronts (leadership skills, self-confidence, etc.).

## **CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS**

So, where to from here? Even though the commitments involved in playing senior inter-county have certain adverse effects, the majority of players are still glad that they made the choice to play at this level. Given this, how can the GAA and GPA ensure that players remain keen to play senior inter-county and, at the same time, address some of the issues identified in this research?

Suggestions have been proposed for some of the specific player welfare issues, and matters that warrant further discussion and research have been identified. However, the underlying source of many of the player welfare issues identified remains: how can the *time commitments* that are being required of players be addressed?

Is there anything involved in playing the current game that can be cut back on or eliminated? Is all the training that is being undertaken, and therefore the time commitment given, needed to get the end results? Are the end results any different to what the situation was like prior to the introduction of a lot of the performance measures that have given rise to the extra time commitments?

Many may not want to hear this, but is there a need to 'pause' to examine how this time commitment issue can be addressed? Is there a need for the associations to

lead as opposed to be led in this regard?

There may be other structural and/or organisational issues that are contributing to time pressures/player welfare issues that are more within the direct control of the GAA that need to be examined: for example, the County Board and inter-county management team relationship, the increased status of Gaelic games and consequential media and supporter attention/pressure, etc.

Although players are aware of the time commitments involved in, and the effects of, playing senior inter-county, they may not want to see a reversal in some of measures that have enhanced their performance levels over the past decade. However, not disrespecting players and/or their contribution to the games, consideration needs to be given to addressing this issue from the viewpoint of safeguarding not just their whole welfare, but also future generations of players. Otherwise, there is a risk that current developments will lead Gaelic games to be as they are perceived, a 'young man's game'.

This examination also warrants attention if the performance measures that have increased the time commitments of inter-county players have started to filter down to the club and the inter-county under-age set-ups, because of the cost implications from such developments. While this is not all about costs, it is an important issue that needs to be considered.

## MAIN FINDINGS

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### CHAPTER 5 COMMITMENTS INVOLVED IN PLAYING SENIOR INTER-COUNTY GAELIC GAMES

- On average, during the 2016 championship players allocated just over 6 hours on a weekday pitched-based training day to their inter-county commitments.
- On a sports conditioning training day, the average time spent varied between 4.4 hours (match week) and 5.4 hours (non-match week).
- Players resident outside (within) their home county spent on average 3.0 (1.8) hours travelling to and from their field-based trainings and 2.4 (1.7) hours to and from their sports conditioning sessions.
- In general, players spent as much time travelling to and from their sports conditioning sessions as they did on the session itself.
- Seventy-two per cent of players undertook both inter-county (field and sports conditioning) and individually instigated training sessions the week of a championship match: this figure was 83 per cent during weeks when there was no game.
- Per week, the baseline average inter-county time commitment of players during the championship varied from 14.5 hours during a match week (inter-county field-based training only) to 30.8 hours during a non-match week (inter-county field-based and sports conditioning, and individually instigated sessions).
- For players that trained/played with their club during the inter-county championship, this added an additional (minimum) 4 hours per week to their Gaelic sport time commitments.
- Players managed to maintain their professional commitments in tandem with their inter-county, but only by sleeping less and devoting less time to personal relationships and general downtime.
- Players aged over 30 devoted more time than average to their professional commitments on a field-based training day but no less time on their inter-county duties: this was achieved through less time spent sleeping and with their family/partner/friends/general downtime.
- Players' resident outside of their home county did not spend any less time on their professional commitments on a field-based training day. Instead, they counterbalanced the extra time that they had to spend travelling to and from training by devoting less time to personal relationships and general downtime.



- Almost half of players (48 per cent) did not get the 8 to 10 hours sleep that is recommended for athletes on a pitch-based training day. This was 63 per cent among players dwelling outside of their home county.
- Sixty-one per cent of players spent two hours or less on personal relationships/general downtime on field-based training days.
- Sixty-eight per cent of players aged between 18 and 21 played with four or more teams during the 2016 season.
- Forty per cent of players had no time off from Gaelic games during the course of 2016.

## **CHAPTER 6 EFFECTS OF PLAYING SENIOR INTER-COUNTY GAELIC GAMES**

- Fifty-two per cent of players sustained an injury while either playing or training with their inter-county team during the 2016 season. Of these, 56 per cent were out from the game for more than a month.
- Almost a third missed between one and six days from work or college, with 6 per cent out for five weeks or more.
- The proportion of players that often/very often played a club match when injured was higher (50 per cent) than the percentage that played an inter-county match (36 per cent).
- Just over half (54 per cent) of those who played an inter-county or club match when injured received medication to do so.
- The majority of players made the final call with regard to playing a senior inter-county match when injured, with their management and medical teams aware of their injury.
- While the players' life satisfaction score is in line with the national average, they recorded lower levels of mental well-being, particularly when compared to individuals of similar age.
- Getting to spend less time with their family, partner and/or friends was identified by 77 per cent of players as the main downside of playing senior inter-county. This becomes a bigger issue as players age, as it was cited as the main downside by 80 per cent of those aged 26 to 30 and 91 per cent of those aged over 30.
- The next main downside was the time commitment involved in playing at this level.
- Forty-six per cent of players agreed/strongly agreed that 'too much effort is demanded of us as players', with another 36 per cent somewhat agreeing.
- Eighty-seven per cent of players indicated that they had to watch their behaviour in public.
- Eighty-three per cent agreed/strongly agreed that they were glad that they made the choice to play inter-county, while another 14 per cent somewhat agreed.

- Overall, 69 per cent of players felt that the development of leadership skills was one of the main benefits that they had experienced as a result of making the transition from a club to inter-county player. This was followed by increased self-confidence and building career connections.
- Almost 30 per cent (29.4 per cent) of players ceased playing senior inter-county at the end of the 2016 season.
- Regardless of age, the main reason for withdrawing from the inter-county game was that players wanted to focus on their professional career. Injury was the next main reason.
- Neither a lack of enjoyment for the game or the game being too demanding was identified as an important factor in why players ceased playing.

## **CHAPTER 7 EFFECTS OF PLAYING SENIOR INTER-COUNTY ON PLAYERS' CLUB INVOLVEMENT**

- Eighty-eight per cent of players agreed/strongly agreed that their club team played a big role in their development as a player, while 70 per cent agreed/strongly agreed that their club is proud that they represent the club on the county team.
- Sixty-three per cent of players agreed/strongly agreed that their club management team was understanding when inter-county commitments restricted them from participating in club training/matches.
- Only just over a third of players agreed/strongly agreed that there was a respectful understanding, and good communication, between their club and county management teams regarding the player's availability to participate for both teams.
- The majority of players (92 per cent) agreed that their inter-county commitments prevented them from socialising with their club teammates.
- Fifty-seven per cent of players said that they were satisfied with the amount of time they got to spend with both their club and county teams during the 2016 pre-season. This figure fell to 52 per cent and 53 per cent respectively for the national league and championship.
- Just under three-quarters of players stated that they would not want to spend more time with their club if it was at a cost to their personal inter-county career success.



## CHAPTER 1

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### Introduction

#### 1.1 CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

*Gaelic games* are traditional Irish amateur sports. There are four games in total: Gaelic football, hurling, handball and rounders (see Section 2.1). Gaelic football and hurling are the most popular. The men's versions of these two games, which are the focus of this report, are organised by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA).

Although Gaelic football and hurling are amateur sports, the advances that have taken place in the two games over the past decade or so have increased the commitments required of players, particularly those playing at senior inter-county level. The evolution that has taken place has predominantly been driven by developments in sports science, new technologies (GPS etc.), education and the use of data, all of which have the aim of increasing the performance levels of players.

In some cases, there have been spill-overs from professional sports into Gaelic games: for example, the adoption of strength and conditioning from rugby and Australian Football League (AFL), and tactical skills from basketball. Consequently, training is no longer confined to pitch-based sessions. Gym-based sports conditioning is now an integral part of a player's training schedule, with most teams having specialised sports conditioning coaches. This means, for most players, a minimum of two additional training sessions per week, on top of two to three field-based training sessions. Often the sports conditioning sessions take place as a team unit, or in smaller team groups, and in some cases at teams' county training bases which means that those players not based in their home county travel home not only for their pitch-based training, but for their sports conditioning sessions as well.

Aside from rehabilitation, players now engage in prehabilitation<sup>1</sup> and recovery sessions, along with full training weekends and/or weeks. Some of the latter often take place outside of a player's home county, and sometimes training weeks are based abroad.

Today, players' diets are monitored, and supplements are an integral part of most players' daily consumption routine. As with the sports conditioning coach, most counties have a nutritionist as part of their backroom team, along with a

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<sup>1</sup> Prehabilitation ('prehab') is a type of strength training to make injury less likely.

physiotherapist, doctor and, in some cases, a sports psychologist and masseur.

Some teams also have at least one statistics person who, with the assistance of video analysis, GPS and other monitoring devices (e.g., Fitlight, Metrifit, the Hudl app), analyses players' performances during training and games. In many cases now as well, a member of the backroom team will monitor players' sleep and recovery in order to maximise performance and minimise the risk of over-training and injury.

Given all of this, there is a concern that today's senior inter-county footballers and hurlers are no longer enjoying the game and that the demands that the modern game is placing on them are having negative effects on their lives. This includes not just their physical and mental well-being, but also the time players have to spend with family and friends and on their professional careers (work/study).

## **1.2 WHY DOES PLAYER WELFARE MATTER?**

Players are central to the GAA and its activities. The Association recognises this and knows that the welfare of players is of paramount importance to the protection and growth of Gaelic games. While this is true of most sports, if not every sport, player welfare is particularly important for the GAA as amateurism is one of its core values. Therefore, unlike professional sports people, Gaelic players are not paid for the commitments that they give to their sport. This amateur ethos has been a core value of the GAA since its foundation. Thus, in order for the GAA to protect this value, it is of critical importance that significant attention be paid to Gaelic players' welfare. For this reason, player welfare is another key value of the GAA – its aim being to facilitate players to reach their potential and, in so doing, to enjoy their experience of playing Gaelic games.

## **1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH**

The GAA and the Gaelic Players Association (GPA), a support body for senior inter-county players, have introduced a number of initiatives over the past decade and a half to ensure that players' contributions to Gaelic games are recognised. This includes ensuring that their needs are tended to and that players can enjoy their playing experience. However, as mentioned in Section 1.1, as the games have evolved in recent years there has been a lot of discussion, but not much analysis, around how much senior inter-county players enjoy playing at that level and the impact the requirements of the modern-day games have on players' lives off the field. Given this, one of the components of the new *GAA/GPA Recognition Protocol*

2017-2019 agreement<sup>2</sup> was the establishment of a working party consisting of players, administrators and others who could assist the two associations to establish the full extent of the demands being placed on senior inter-county players. This group was formed with the intention of helping the GAA and GPA to jointly develop measures that will allow Gaelic players to maintain a balance between their needs as club and inter-county players and their personal and professional lives.

As a first step in this process, the two associations jointly commissioned the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) as an independent organisation to examine:

- (i) the commitment demanded of players on account of their participation in senior inter-county hurling and football panels;
- (ii) the impact, both positive and negative, that playing at this level has on players' personal and professional lives;
- (iii) the impact that playing at this level has on their involvement with their clubs.

The examination presented in this report focuses on providing evidence in relation to these three objectives, with the analysis based on 2016 senior inter-county players. While the analysis is comprehensive, it is by no means exhaustive. Nevertheless, as opposed to relying on anecdotal evidence, this is the first time that all involved in Gaelic players' welfare will have empirical evidence on (i) the current broad requirements to play senior inter-county, and (ii) the main effects of these on players' lives and club involvement. This factual information can then be utilised by the working group established under the most recent GAA–GPA agreement to examine this matter. Specifically, it can be used to develop measures that will enable both current and future players to enjoy their experiences of playing senior inter-county while at the same time achieving better balance in all areas of their lives.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Although the GAA and GPA collect information on Gaelic players, their data were not comprehensive enough to examine in detail the experiences of being a senior inter-county player. Given this, the first step in this study was to design a questionnaire to administer to players so that the objectives of the research could be addressed. There were three main strands to the development of this

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<sup>2</sup> A formal agreement that sets out the terms of recognition by the GAA of the GPA, and the former's engagement with the latter.

questionnaire, as follows.

- (i) *Consultative research*: This included the establishment of an Oversight Body, and engagement with senior inter-county managers, County Board Secretaries and third-level Games Development Officers (GDOs).
- (ii) *Desk-based research*: This involved reviewing national and international research that examined player welfare issues.
- (iii) *Qualitative research*: The design of the player questionnaire was, for the most part, driven by the players themselves. Specifically, player workshops were conducted in each province. The information gathered at these workshops was then used to develop the *Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016* (SSICP-2016) questionnaire, which was administered to all 2016 players between May and the end of August 2017.

## 1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The remainder of the report is structured as follows. For those not familiar with Gaelic games, Chapter 2 provides additional information on how the games are organised, playing structures, seasons, competitions, etc. This chapter also presents an overview of the GAA's and the GPA's focus on player welfare (e.g. their initiatives), their engagement on this matter and their spend. Chapter 3 briefly outlines previous research on a range of player welfare issues, internationally and specific to Gaelic players. The research methodologies and data used in this study are set out in Chapter 4. Chapters 5 to 7 provide a descriptive examination of the experiences of playing senior inter-county Gaelic games, particularly from the perspective of 2016 players.

Specifically, Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the amount of *time* that players allocate to playing senior inter-county, with a focus on the 2016 championship time period (i.e., late May/June). Based on the information gathered at senior inter-county player workshops (see Chapter 3), time is one of the main commitments required to play senior inter-county, and has knock-on implications for other areas of players' lives outside of their involvement in Gaelic games. Chapter 5 also presents an examination of (i) the number and types of training sessions that senior inter-county players undertake with their county teams; (ii) engagement with other Gaelic teams during the championship, which for most players will be their club team; and (iii) individually instigated training sessions. Players' levels of satisfaction with the training to game ratio during the pre-season, national league and championship are also investigated, in addition to whether players had time off from Gaelic games during the 2016 season.

Chapter 6 presents an examination of the impact of playing senior inter-county on players' personal and professional lives. Some of the issues examined in this chapter are: (i) injuries, (ii) players' general welfare, (iii) players' perceptions of whether their inter-county commitments take up a lot their time and if this impacts on time spent on other activities that they want to do; (iv) the downsides to playing senior inter-county; (v) the areas of their lives in which players have benefited as a result of playing inter-county; (vi) what players view as being the most important aspects of their inter-county experience; and (vii) identification of the reasons why players ceased playing inter-county at the end of the 2016 season.

Chapter 7 investigates the effects of playing senior inter-county on players' club involvement, while Chapter 8 outlines the main conclusions and policy implications that can be drawn from the research.



## CHAPTER 2

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### Gaelic games and player welfare

#### 2.1 GAELIC GAMES

The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), which was founded in 1884, was set up to help revive and nurture traditional Irish sports and pastimes. It was also established with the intention of making athletics more accessible to all of society as, at that time, it was predominantly the preserve of those from more privileged backgrounds.<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned in Section 1.1, the men's versions of Gaelic football and hurling are organised by the GAA. Handball and rounders, both the men and women's versions,<sup>4</sup> are also under the remit of the GAA.<sup>5</sup> Ladies' hurling, known as camogie, and ladies' Gaelic football are organised by two separate associations. Camogie, which was founded in 1904, is managed by the Camogie Association of Ireland (CAI), while ladies' Gaelic football, which was established in 1974, is run by the Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA). The three associations have their own governance and traditions, but work together to promote the playing of Gaelic games.<sup>6</sup>

The island of Ireland has 32 counties, all but one of which has a representative team in both hurling and Gaelic football.<sup>7</sup> Counties are subdivided into smaller community areas called parishes and each of these, or an amalgamation, are represented by club teams. The GAA has 1,616 affiliated clubs in Ireland and a further 400 international clubs. This makes it the largest sporting organisation in the country (Delaney and Fahey, 2005), and also the largest amateur sporting body in the world.<sup>8</sup>

Individuals start off playing with their clubs and some progress to represent their

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<sup>3</sup> <https://crokepark.ie/stadium/about/gaa-history>

<sup>4</sup> There are also mixed men and women's rounders teams.

<sup>5</sup> Rounders since 1884 and ladies' handball since 1998. Ladies' handball was founded in 1971: it had its own separate association until it merged with the main handball body, Comhairle Liathróid Láimhe, which is under the remit of the GAA, in 1998.

<sup>6</sup> In 2017 the three associations agreed a draft Memorandum of Understanding whereby *common* national-level functions will be jointly administered and those that are *unique* to each association will be administered separately.

<sup>7</sup> London and New York have inter-county Gaelic football teams as well. Both participate in the championship competition, while London also plays in the national football league. London has a hurling team, as do Lancashire (UK) and Warwickshire (UK). These three teams play in the hurling championship. Cavan has had a senior inter-county hurling team only since 2017, while Kilkenny does not have a senior inter-county football team.

<sup>8</sup> <http://learning.gaa.ie/IntroGaelicGames>

county, thereby becoming inter-county as well as club players. Some individuals also play with their secondary school and/or third-level education institution Gaelic teams.<sup>9</sup>

According to Sport Ireland (2018), Gaelic football<sup>10</sup> and hurling<sup>11</sup> were the eighth and twelfth most popular sporting activities that individuals aged 16 and over participated in during 2017 in Ireland. Focusing on team sports only, these Gaelic games were the second and third most popular activities in the country at that time, with soccer number one.<sup>12</sup>

Equivalent national sports participation figures do not exist for juveniles. We do know, however, that the number of children aged between eight and 18 that were registered with the GAA in 2017 was 209,603.<sup>13</sup> Based on Central Statistics Office (CSO) population estimates of the number of eight- to 18-year-olds in Ireland in 2017 (714,043),<sup>14</sup> this means that almost 30 per cent of juveniles in this age bracket were playing Gaelic games in 2017.

Children can start playing Gaelic football and hurling with their local GAA club as young as three years of age. Between this and the age of 11, informal training and games are organised on an age -graded basis (under-6s etc.). The focus for these younger players is on having fun, developing friends and learning the basic skills of the games.<sup>15</sup>

Competitive games commence at under-12 (U12) and continue up to senior level: this applies to both club and inter-county. In general, each age grade, at both club and county levels, will play in two competitions: a league and championship. For senior inter-county, there is also a pre-season competition.

For club players, the league and championship playing periods vary from county to county. In general, senior teams<sup>16</sup> play county league games from March onwards,

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<sup>9</sup> As well as club and inter-county competitions organised by the GAA, there are separate secondary school and third-level competitions. The secondary school competitions are organised by Comhairle Iarbhunscoileanna and the third level by Higher Education GAA.

<sup>10</sup> Includes ladies' Gaelic football.

<sup>11</sup> Includes camogie.

<sup>12</sup> The 12 most popular 'sporting' activities in Ireland in 2017 were: personal exercise, swimming, running, cycling, soccer, dancing, golf, Gaelic football, yoga, weights, Pilates and hurling/camogie (Sport Ireland, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> This is a lower bound figure as it does not capture eight- to nine-year-olds who play in informal Gaelic game blitzes but do not get registered until they start playing competitively.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/databases>

<sup>15</sup> For further information, see [www.gaa.ie/gogames](http://www.gaa.ie/gogames)

<sup>16</sup> In every county, club adult teams are graded, on the basis of performance, as senior, intermediate or junior. There are separate league and championship competitions for each of these playing levels. However, in the context of club teams in this report, 'senior' relates to the club's main adult team, whether that is senior,

training for which usually commences in January. The league is based on a divisional format, with teams of similar ability (as determined by their performance in the previous year's league competition) playing in the same division. The top-performing teams are placed in Division 1, with the next most proficient group of club teams in Division 2, and so on.

The senior club county championship is typically played from late July to October.<sup>17</sup> Club teams that win their county's championship final go on to represent their county in a provincial competition. There are four such competitions: Connacht, Leinster, Munster and Ulster. These provincial games are usually played between September and December. The winners of these finals proceed to the All-Ireland senior club championship series, played between January and March of the following year.

For the other club teams (U17 etc.), there is too much variation across counties to identify set playing periods for the league and championship.<sup>18</sup>

With regard to inter-county, formal competitions only take place from U17 upwards. The U17 competitions are played in the spring/summer seasons, while the U20 football and the U21 hurling competitions are currently played in the summer months.

For senior inter-county players, their pre-season competition takes place in January, the national league from February to the start of April and the championship from mid-May to August/September. The pre-season competitions are provincial-based (i.e., Connacht, Leinster, Munster and Ulster). The national league is based on a 32-county format, similar to the club league, where teams of similar ability are grouped in the same division. There are four divisions in total; therefore, there is competition for four national league titles.

There is one football championship competition, with the winners awarded the Sam Maguire Cup. The football championship begins as a provincial-based competition and then expands into an All-Ireland series. The hurling championship

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intermediate or junior. Some clubs with large playing populations are able to field more than one adult team; thus, they may have a team competing in the senior competitions and also the intermediate and/or junior competitions.

<sup>17</sup> In some counties the senior championship commences in April, but, for the most part, counties tend to wait until their senior inter-county team is knocked out of the championship before organising the club championship games.

<sup>18</sup> For further information on the playing structure of teams, the rules of the games, etc., see <http://learning.gaa.ie/IntroGaelicGames>

consists of five competitions: MacCarthy Cup, McDonagh Cup,<sup>19</sup> Christy Ring Cup, Nicky Rackard Cup and Lory Meagher Cup. The competitions are graded, with the strongest hurling counties playing in the MacCarthy Cup down to the weakest participating in the Lory Meagher Cup. Apart from the MacCarthy Cup teams, the winners (losers) of the other four competitions move up (down) to the next tiered competition in the following year's championship. As with the football championship, the MacCarthy Cup starts as a provincial competition and then opens into an All-Ireland series, whereas the other hurling competitions are run off as All-Ireland series competitions.

Senior inter-county players commence training for the pre-season approximately two months prior to the start of the games (i.e. the previous November/December). When not playing competition matches, players will train right through from this time point until their county team is knocked out of the championship. In 2018, however, senior inter-county competition ceased for the month of April: this change, which has been introduced for a three-year trial period, has been implemented to allow players more time with their club teams.

In addition to Gaelic games, the GAA supports the Irish language, music, song and dance. This is predominantly achieved through *Scór*, a GAA competition open to club members of all ages that covers all aspects of Irish culture (céilí and set dancing, singing, storytelling, ballad groups, instrumental music, etc.).

The GAA also sets itself a range of social and cultural objectives, and has a number of initiatives in these areas. For example, the GAA's Healthy Club Project (HCP)<sup>20</sup> aims to promote the health and well-being of its club members and the wider community,<sup>21</sup> while the goal of the GAA Social Initiative is to increase participation of older members of society in its clubs through events designed to enhance their lives and to respect the important contribution that older people make to community life.

Given the GAA's presence in every community in Ireland, through its clubs, the Association makes a significant contribution to Irish society, whether through sport or its other social or cultural activities. Furthermore, given the number of people that support Gaelic games – for example, there were almost one million attendees

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<sup>19</sup> Introduced in 2018 to assist counties who want to compete in the top hurling competition (the MacCarthy Cup).

<sup>20</sup> Joint initiative between the GAA and the Health Service Executive (HSE). The GAA began its partnership with the HSE to deliver health promotion activities in 2006.

<sup>21</sup> The results from an evaluation of the first phase of this programme found that the HCP was effective in achieving its goals (Lane et al., 2015).

at the 45 All-Ireland series championship matches in 2017<sup>22</sup> – the GAA also makes an important economic contribution to Irish society.

## 2.2 PLAYER WELFARE

Formal recognition of the importance of looking after Gaelic players can be traced back to a 1997 GAA Taskforce that examined amateurism within the games. Arising from the work of this body – the 1997 GAA Amateur Status Report – the GAA’s Central Council<sup>23</sup> adopted minimum provisions of what should be provided for inter-county players in the areas of expenses, training and leisure gear, ticket allocations, etc. These provisions have been updated over the past 20 years, most significantly in 2003, and are now officially laid out in the annual Player Charter. This Charter was established in 2008 by the GAA and GPA. It put in place an appropriate structure in which County Boards and senior inter-county panels, hurling and Gaelic football separately, could meet and engage on matters of mutual interest. The Player Charter must be agreed on by the County Board and inter-county team representatives and submitted to Central Council at the start of each year.<sup>24</sup> It then requires approval by Central Council before any funding is provided to County Boards towards the running of their senior inter-county teams.

In 2006, the GAA Medical, Scientific and Welfare Committee (MSWC) was established. This committee comprises medical professionals (doctors, physiotherapists, etc.), sports scientists, former inter-county players and GAA administrators. The MSWC’s primary function is to advise the GAA on medical and general welfare matters relevant to Gaelic games. Over the years, it has been the main GAA committee dealing with player welfare. To assist the MSWC in its work, it utilises data that are gathered on inter-county players’ injuries through the National GAA Injury Surveillance Database.<sup>25</sup>

After the establishment of the MSWC in 2006, the Association took the decision to appoint a full-time Player Welfare Manager in 2007. In 2010, player welfare responsibilities were incorporated into the GAA’s new Department of Games Administration and Player Welfare; the first Games Welfare Administrator was

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<sup>22</sup> The total figure was 977,523 (GAA, 2018a).

<sup>23</sup> The GAA is a democratic organisation that consists of the following units: (i) clubs, (ii) county committees, (iii) provincial councils, (iv) Central Council and (v) Annual Congress. Annual Congress is the equivalent of an Annual General Meeting (AGM). It is at these meetings that decisions are made regarding the rules of the Association and its activities. In between Annual Congresses, Central Council is the governing body of the Association: it often endorses proposals put forward by GAA’s management that do not require the approval of Annual Congress (<http://www.gaa.ie/the-gaa/about-the-gaa/structures>).

<sup>24</sup> The Charter needs to be agreed no later than 15 December annually, and then submitted to Central Council no later than the following 31 January.

<sup>25</sup> This database is administered in University College Dublin (UCD).

appointed in 2012.

Some of the key player welfare issues that the GAA focuses on are:

1. support for injured players through the Player Injury Benefit Fund;
2. injury prevention and recovery;
3. best-practice training and team preparation;
4. education on nutrition;
5. practical initiatives to promote safety and well-being (e.g. supply and use of defibrillators);
6. monitoring and investigating medical and scientific research for new initiatives to benefit players;
7. ensuring best-practice injury treatment in a cost-effective manner;
8. ensuring compliance with anti-doping requirements through education and monitoring.<sup>26</sup>

The Association set up the GAA Player Injury Benefit Fund<sup>27</sup> to provide benefits to Gaelic players, both inter-county and club, when injured. This fund seeks to supplement personal accident or health insurance arrangements that players might also have. In addition, the GAA established a Benevolent Fund in 2008 to assist players, and also other members of the Association, who fall on hard times, especially due to injuries sustained when playing Gaelic games. Since 2017, €200,000 of this fund is being set aside annually for retired inter-county players to apply for, specifically to treat injuries sustained from their involvement in the inter-county game.<sup>28</sup>

In relation to anti-doping, the GAA provides advice and education to inter-county teams by:

1. organising education seminars for county team doctors, physiotherapists and other team officials;

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<sup>26</sup> <http://learning.gaa.ie/PlayerWelfare>

<sup>27</sup> The GAA is not legally obliged to provide support to players when injured, but it has been operating some type of player injury scheme since 1929.

<sup>28</sup> This initiative is part of the *GAA/GPA Recognition Protocol 2017–2019*: this agreement is discussed in more detail later in this section of the report.

2. liaising with Sport Ireland (SI), Ireland's national sporting authority with responsibility for combating doping in sport in Ireland,<sup>29</sup> on behalf of inter-county teams;
3. co-ordinating team whereabouts, which is part of SI's anti-doping rules;
4. distributing annually the World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA's) list of substances and methods (steroids, stimulants, gene doping, etc.) that are banned from use in sport;
5. administering and managing the communication of anti-doping results to players and county secretaries;
6. online education programmes.

The actual anti-doping tests are conducted by SI officials. This testing can take place in one of two ways. First, tests can be administered after matches, where players are randomly selected to give samples. Testers can also arrive unannounced at training sessions: players will, again, be chosen at random to give samples. In relation to the latter type of testing, counties are required to maintain 'whereabouts' records so that SI is kept informed as to where teams are training week to week. As mentioned previously, the GAA co-ordinates this team whereabouts activity.

The GAA disseminates most of its player welfare information<sup>30</sup> through a dedicated player website, which is available to players at all levels.

The GAA spent just over €3.7 million on its various player welfare initiatives and programmes in 2017, an increase of almost €2.6 million on 2016 (GAA, 2018a). The Association spent a further €2.9 million on its injury scheme and Player Injury Benefit Fund in 2017, which resulted in player welfare spending accounting for 10.1 per cent of its total revenue in 2017. The GAA funds its various player welfare programmes and injury schemes from the income that it receives from match gate receipts, which was 52 per cent of its revenue in 2017; commercial revenue (28.6 per cent);<sup>31</sup> other income (12.3 per cent);<sup>32</sup> and State funding (6.8 per cent).

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<sup>29</sup> SI is responsible for enforcing WADA's World Anti-Doping Code and International Standards for sport in Ireland. Although senior inter-county players are amateurs, they must comply with SI's anti-doping rules, which are fundamentally WADA's rules.

<sup>30</sup> For example, information and advice on injuries, information on anti-doping, nutrition advice and cardiac screening.

<sup>31</sup> Media coverage, sponsorship, franchising and licensing fee (GAA, 2018a).

<sup>32</sup> Registration fees, net interest, income from Pairc an Chrócaigh CTR (responsible for the management and operation of Croke Park Stadium), fines and other income (GAA, 2018a).

In addition to the GAA's own player welfare initiatives,<sup>33</sup> a group of players established their own association in 1999, known as the Gaelic Players Association (GPA). The GPA was created as a support body for inter-county players, in particular to advance players' welfare requirements with the GAA.

As well as the GPA engaging with the GAA, in 2004 the body held discussions with Irish government officials, the Department of Sport<sup>34</sup> and the GAA for the provision of State support to senior inter-county players as parity of esteem with other Irish athletes in receipt of such assistance. The GPA reached agreement with both organisations on this support in 2007. This resulted in the first government-backed scheme, known as the Government Eligible Expenses Scheme (GEES), being administered to every inter-county player who participated in the 2008 GAA Championship. The purpose of the GEES is to allow players to recoup eligible expenses incurred because of their participation in an inter-county panel (gym membership, physiotherapy, etc.).<sup>35</sup> Under this scheme, players also have increased involvement in the promotion of sport and healthy lifestyles with Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs): LSPs, which are under the auspices of SI, promote participation in sport at a local (i.e. county) level.

In 2017, funding of €1.6 million was available for the GEES, and individual payments to players ranged from €647 to €1,489. The size of payments, which are capped, is determined by a given county's progression in the championship and panel size. In addition, a player must still be on their county panel on the 01 May of the payment year for them to qualify for the GEES. By 2019, which will be the third year of the most recent agreement between the GPA, Department of Sport and GAA on the GEES, the overall funding for this scheme will have increased to €3 million. While the GAA's Player Welfare Manager is a serving officer on the body that oversees the GEES, the National Scheme Committee (NSC), the GPA carries out most of the required GEES administrative work.

The GPA was formally recognised by the GAA as the official representative body for senior inter-county players in 2010. Currently, 2,049 senior inter-county players are members of the GPA: this relates to 2016 championship panel members and is approximately 93 per cent of the full population of 2016 players.<sup>36</sup> A further 440

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<sup>33</sup> See also Appendix A (Section A.1) for further details on the GAA's current player welfare policies and resources.

<sup>34</sup> Currently known as the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

<sup>35</sup> Expenses that have not already been paid by the GAA or any other individual/organisation (e.g. benefactor).

<sup>36</sup> 2017 is the most recent year for which we have GPA membership information. Membership is spread across 67 teams: 62 counties (31 football – Kilkenny no team in 2016, and 31 hurling – Cavan no team in 2016), plus Fingal, Lancashire, London and Warwickshire hurlers, and London footballers. To derive the membership percentage, calculation of the total population of 2016 players is based on a panel size of 33 players.



former senior inter-county players are also members of the GPA.<sup>37</sup>

The terms of recognition by the GAA of the GPA, and engagement with the body, are set out under a formal agreement. This agreement, known as the *GAA/GPA Recognition Protocol*, was established in 2011. The first agreement, which covered the period 2011 to 2016, included annual funding by the GAA of a range of player welfare and development programmes provided by the GPA to inter-county players: specifically, career, education, health and well-being, and life skills programmes.

The 2011 protocol was renewed in 2016 to cover the period 2017 to 2019: the *Recognition Protocol 2017–2019*. Under this new agreement, the GPA is tasked with providing the most comprehensive range of player welfare and development programmes to support senior inter-county players.<sup>38</sup> To support the GPA in this regard, the new protocol also provides for continued funding from the GAA of its player welfare and development programmes. Specifically, the GAA is providing €2.5 million, or 15 per cent of net central commercial revenue<sup>39</sup> (whichever is higher), in each year of the agreement for the GPA's player welfare programmes. In addition, under a revamped commercial partnership between the two Associations, known as Le Chéile, the GAA has underwritten the partnership to a guaranteed €800,000 per annum, which is being allocated annually to the GPA for investment in player services.<sup>40</sup>

With regard to providing supports to senior inter-county players, the GPA introduced its Player Development Programmes (PDPs) in 2010. The PDP offers players a range of courses and services that cover: (i) career, (ii) education, (iii) life focus, and (iv) health and well-being. The objective of the PDP is to ensure that players do not neglect these critical areas of their lives while meeting the commitments required to be a senior inter-county player. The PDPs are also available to players when they cease playing.

Under the heading of 'career' the GPA offers: (i) career development, (ii) business start-up and development, and (iii) presentation and public speaking courses. Their two education services are education advice and third-level scholarships. Under

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<sup>37</sup> The GPA's programmes are available to any former players who were part of a previous championship panel (e.g. 2016, 1988, 1966) and pay an annual membership fee. Players who might only feature for their county team in the league, and who become GPA members, are entitled to certain non-elective services (e.g. cardiac screening, gumshields, and enhanced injury scheme cover).

<sup>38</sup> Clause 1.3.3 of the *GAA/GPA Recognition Protocol 2017–2019* agreement.

<sup>39</sup> This relates to income from media coverage, sponsorship, franchising and licensing.

<sup>40</sup> Under the 2017–2019 agreement, the mileage rate paid to players to cover senior inter-county travel costs has been increased (from 50c to 62.5–65c per mile). Also, a new nutritional voucher has been introduced, along with a €200,000 annual fund to cover surgical interventions for former inter-county players.

the 'life focus' element there is (i) the GPA personal development coaching programme and (ii) the Jim Madden GPA leadership programme, along with (iii) financial advice. Finally, under the health and well-being heading the GPA offers (i) a 24/7 counselling line, which is available 365 days of the year, and (ii) a residential treatment programme.<sup>41</sup> The GPA also provides cardiac screening and a gumshield (mouthguard) programme.<sup>42</sup>

Between 2008 and the end of December 2017, the GPA provided 15,794 programmes: 9,592 player development programmes (career development, third-level scholarships, financial advice, etc.), 5,538 player welfare programmes (cardiac screening and gumshield programmes), and 664 player support programmes (counselling, residential treatment, etc.).<sup>43</sup>

In addition to its player welfare and development programmes, the GPA operates a Benevolent Fund. This is separate from the GAA's Benevolent Fund; similarly to the GAA's fund, players can apply to it in times of difficulty.

In 2015, the GPA received just over €2.3 million from the GAA to fund its player development, welfare and support programmes. This increased to €2.8 million in 2016. Over this period, GPA spending on its player programmes increased from just over €1.7 million to almost €2.5 million, which was 40 (39) per cent of its total revenue in 2016 (2015). In addition to the GAA funding, and the GEES, the GPA engages in its own fundraising to finance its activities, along with generating some commercial revenue<sup>44</sup> (GPA, 2017). It also obtains some revenue from membership fees, benevolent fund donations and other income.<sup>45</sup>

To assist the GPA with its work, particularly in terms of information and knowledge exchange, the GPA is affiliated to EU Athletes, which is a collective representative union for over 25,000 EU athletes. The GPA also engages with Rugby Players Ireland (RPI) and the Women's Gaelic Players Association (WGPA); again, to share knowledge on player welfare issues. The WGPA, which was established in 2015, represents the interests of those playing senior inter-county ladies' Gaelic football and camogie. Its objective is to improve the experiences of such players both on and off the field. Some of the ways in which it does this are through the provision

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<sup>41</sup> See Appendix A (Section A.2) for participant numbers in the GPA's various PDPs between 2011/2012 and the end of 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Since 1 January 2014, it has been mandatory for all Gaelic footballers to wear a mouthguard. This rule was introduced by the GAA due to research that indicated that Ireland had one of the highest rates of sport-related oral injuries in the EU (GAA, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> For further details on the player welfare measures that the GPA has pursued or implemented in recent years, see Appendix A (Section A.3).

<sup>44</sup> Derived through the commercial partnership that the GPA has with the GAA (Le Chéile).

<sup>45</sup> Other income is made up of fees for services supplied by the GPA.

of a 24/7 membership support line, third-level scholarships, leadership programmes, personal coaching and career guidance.

Underpinning the most recent recognition agreement between the GAA and GPA (the *Recognition Protocol 2017–2019*) is an acknowledgement by both organisations that they are each committed to maintaining and protecting the amateur status of the GAA. Under this agreement, the GPA is also fully devoted to the promotion of Gaelic games and to the values of the GAA when pursuing its objectives. In reaching this new deal, both the GAA and GPA recognised that the provision of a strong player welfare service was critical to retaining the amateur status of players. For this reason, both associations are committed to promoting players' welfare.

## CHAPTER 3

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### Previous literature on player welfare

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we examine national and international research on player welfare in sports, with the Irish studies focusing on player welfare among Gaelic players.

‘Player welfare’ is a term that is commonly used both in research and in the wider public sphere. However, there is no internationally recognised definition of what it actually means. As a result, the literature discussed in this chapter crosses a number of domains that could be considered related to player welfare (training load and injuries, emotional well-being, burnout, work–life balance, sleep, travel, athletic identity, etc.).

Where possible, a distinction is made between players who are participating in amateur sports entirely without remuneration and professional sportspeople who are paid a wage for the time that they spend training and competing. However, in some sports, and consequently in the literature, this distinction is not clear-cut, with some players receiving scholarships to pay university fees, rent and living expenses, or receiving money through sponsorship deals. Also, although some of the research examined uses the term ‘elite’ sport or athlete, there is inconsistency and confusion in its use throughout the literature: it ranges from Olympic champions to regional-level athletes, and can include professional and amateur athletes (Swann et al., 2015). Given this, the term ‘elite’ is used in this chapter only where the authors have explicitly used it.

#### 3.2 INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE ON PLAYER WELFARE ISSUES

##### 3.2.1 Player burnout

Early definitions of burnout (not specific to sport) came from the psychological perspective where individuals reported their symptoms using a range of subscales that measured their levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced sense of accomplishment (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Regarding athletes, player burnout is considered to be on the rise (Gould and Dieffenbach, 2002). However, the research area is relatively new and therefore limited.

In one study, Gustafsson et al. (2007) examined the prevalence of burnout among 980 competitive Swedish athletes aged between 16 and 21 who were participating in 29 different individual and team sports. They found that 1–2 per cent of the sample reported experiencing severe levels of burnout, and 1–9 per cent reported

high levels of burnout. Literature on athlete burnout often attributes it to increased levels of training, pressure and commercialisation in sport, along with the 'never-ending nature of competition' and the blurring of the line between on- and off-seasons (Weinberg and Gould, 2003). Raedeke et al. (2002, p. 181) described burnout among elite athletes as 'a withdrawal from [sport] noted by a reduced sense of accomplishment, devaluation/resentment of sport, and physical/psychological exhaustion'.

Symptoms of burnout can include exhaustion stemming from the stress associated with intense training; having a reduced sense of athletic accomplishment; and having a loss of motivation (Gustafsson et al., 2011). In particular, athletes are thought to experience burnout if they are participating in sport because they feel they 'have to' (sport entrapment) rather than they 'want to' (sport attraction) (Schmidt and Stein, 1991; Raedeke, 1997). According to Gustafsson et al. (2011), the combination of physical and psychological stressors that elite sport can give rise to is linked to a range of common mental disorders (CMDs) throughout the careers of elite sportspeople. The CMD symptoms include distress, depression, anxiety and substance dependency/abuse.

In their research on burnout among elite rugby players in New Zealand, Hodge et al. (2008) found that basic psychological needs (such as autonomy, competence and relatedness)<sup>46</sup> are crucial in influencing the burnout process. They suggest that it is important that sports providers and practitioners are aware of this, as supporting basic psychological needs satisfaction may prevent player burnout. Hodge et al. (2008) cite an international study (Gagne, 2003) that suggests that autonomy support (versus control) from parents and coaches can prevent burnout and 'help athletes sustain positive emotions, be more energised and have higher and more stable self-esteem' (Gagne, 2003, p. 386). Mageau and Vallerand (2003) outline a number of psychological 'needs supportive' practices that can influence players' sense of autonomy:

- provide players with choice and decision making regarding team issues;
- provide players with a rationale for tasks and explain the logic behind key decisions;
- enquire about and acknowledge others' feelings;

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<sup>46</sup> According to self-determination theory, competence, autonomy, and relatedness are considered basic psychological needs (Ryan and Deci, 2000). These needs must be fulfilled in order to enjoy optimal well-being. In a sporting context, self-determination theory is considered a useful framework in which to study sports participation and drop-out (see for example Calvo et al., 2010).

- provide opportunities for players to take the initiative and do independent work (e.g. allowing players to lead a game debrief session or take a leadership role in training);
- provide constructive performance feedback that focuses on the 'solution' more than the performance 'problem';
- avoid guilt-inducing or controlling criticisms;
- reduce ego involvement by avoiding intra-team rivalries and social comparisons.

Much of the burnout literature focuses on the causes and centres on two, often interrelated, arguments. Firstly, burnout in high-performance sports is the result of characteristics of the individual who experiences excessive stress while playing sport. Burnout is, therefore, the result of individual athletes' inability to deal with the demands of elite sport. These individualistic approaches argue that inability to cope with the demands of a sport is a personal failure of the athlete rather than a broader organisational problem (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The second argument is that burnout is the product of the environment or social organisation in which the athlete operates. One of the most prominent commentators on this issue has been Coakley (1992), for whom burnout among athletes was the product of situational factors, such as the social organisation of high-performance sport. Based on his analysis of athletes in a range of sports, both team-based and individual, his findings showed how player burnout is connected to the 'social organisation of the high performance sport itself' (Coakley, 1992, p. 282) or the sport's governing body. This approach also takes account of the influential role of advisers, coaches and parents in decisions around player involvement in sport.

The field of applied sports psychology has added to the literature on stress and burnout among elite athletes. In particular, there is an increasing awareness of the psychological well-being of elite athletes (Markser, 2011). While sport is now a well-known factor in preventing stress, depression and anxiety, Schaal et al. (2011) note that practising sport at an elite level can give rise to anxiety, depression and other mental health difficulties, along with abuse of performance-enhancing substances. Feeling unable to cope, stress and pressure associated with elite sports have also been shown to negatively impact on player behaviour, often resulting in alcohol misuse, gambling, driving while intoxicated and unprotected sex (Lisha and Sussman, 2010). Some of these risk-taking behaviours take place during or after players' sports careers have ended. In some sports, such as gymnastics and other weight-dependent sports, eating disorders are more common, particularly among female athletes (Sundgot-Borgen and Torstveit, 2004).

Player welfare and the mental health of sports people are gaining increasing

attention in sports literature on professional footballers, with findings suggesting higher than average CMDs among retired professional players (Gouttebarga et al., 2015c; Wood et al., 2017). Similarly, just under half of retired professional/elite rugby union players have been found to be suffering from two or more CMDs (Gouttebarga et al., 2015b; Hodge et al., 2008). However, recent research suggests the culture of elite sport means that the subject of mental health is still considered taboo and prevalence rates for poor mental health are considered to be underestimated (Gouttebarga et al., 2015a; Bauman, 2015).

### **3.2.2 Training load and injuries**

Several research studies in the sports physiology area have examined the relationship between the training loads (TLs) of players and sports injuries and illness. Much of this literature focuses on the link between overtraining and injury, with few studies seeking to identify the optimum training load where injuries can be minimised and performance enhanced (Soligard et al., 2016).

Focusing on 79 professional rugby league players over a four-year period, Gabbett and Jenkins (2011) implemented a periodised field, strength, and power training programme with training loads progressively increased in pre-season and reduced during the competitive phase. They found that the harder a player trains, the more injuries they sustain, and that high strength and power TLs may contribute to injuries on the field. Also in rugby, Cross et al. (2016) found a link between high TL and player injury. Focusing on a cohort of 173 professional rugby union players from four English Premiership teams, they found a positive linear relationship between large week-to-week changes in TL and injury risk during the in-season period. In Australia, research has highlighted the training–injury relationship among elite Australian footballers. Measuring training and game loads among 46 AFL players, Rogalski et al. (2013) found that, in season, as the weekly TL increases, so does the risk of injury. The authors suggest that weekly TL for players should be individually monitored in order to reduce the risk of injury.

In the US, Watson et al. (2016) examined the impact of training load on the risk of injury and illness among 75 female adolescent soccer players. They found that higher TL is associated with injury and risk of illness among youth soccer players. Malone et al. (2016) examined the relationship between training and game loads and injury risk among 48 elite soccer players in two teams at the highest level of European competition. Again, they found a relationship between weekly internal TLs and injury risk. A systematic review of research on the relationship between TL and injury by Drew and Finch (2016) also found that the TL applied to an athlete appears to be related to their risk of injury. This review examined 787 research studies based on a range of sports including rugby league, rugby union, football, athletics and cricket. The authors suggest that coaches, athletes and support staff

need to be aware of the risks following 'spikes' in training loads.

Some research has focused on elite sports where there are severe and recurrent injuries and, as a result, players may be at greater risk of mental health problems during or after their sports career. For example, Putukian's (2015) work examines how physical injuries can trigger mental health issues among elite athletes, including depression and suicidal ideation, anxiety, disordered eating, and substance use/abuse. She suggests that several problematic responses can occur concurrently among athletes after an injury, such as alcohol abuse, depression and eating disorders.

### **3.2.3 Sleep**

There is well-known literature on the effects of poor sleep on the population generally, with research highlighting it as a serious public health concern (Irish et al., 2015). Lack of sleep is associated with many social problems including car accidents, medical errors and accidents, and errors in the workplace. Poor sleep is also associated with poor health, including hypertension, depression, diabetes and obesity, in addition to higher mortality rates (Grandner et al., 2015).

While the recommended amount of sleep for the general population is seven to nine hours (Hirshkowitz et al., 2015), it has been advised that athletes get between eight and ten hours' sleep per night (Samuels and Alexander, 2013). They require more sleep to recover sufficiently from intense training periods, competition and injury (Marshall and Turner, 2016). Sleep duration and quality have also been identified as key components in athletes' training and performance in competitions (Marshall and Turner, 2016; Fullagar et al., 2015; Bird, 2013). However, sleep is often neglected by athletes and their coaches when optimising recovery and competition performance (Marshall and Turner, 2016). For example, Taylor et al. (2016) highlight that many young athletes are often coached within structured timetables, often involving evening training sessions, and matches with 'long commutes' are quite common. This is often followed by early educational classes with 'rigid start times', which can lead to a cycle of reduced or disturbed sleep (Taylor et al., 2016). Thus, low sleep quantity and quality are common among sports people (Leeder et al., 2012; Simpson et al., 2017).

In terms of the quantity of sleep that athletes get, Marshall and Turner (2016) and Davenne (2009) talk about the detrimental effect that 'sleep deprivation' has been found to have on athletes' performance: for example, reduced motivation; cognitive slowing leading to poor attention and concentration, memory impairment, decreased vigilance and response capability; and heightened levels of perceived exertion and pain perception. They also discuss the effects of sleep deprivation on athletes' aerobic and anaerobic pathways, metabolism, and



immune and cardiovascular systems, along with fatigue and recovery processes. Other research has specifically examined the negative impacts of short-term sleep deprivation on sports people's performance. Examples include strength and power (Reilly and Piercy, 1994; Souissi et al., 2013), endurance (Oliver et al., 2009; Mougín et al., 1991), accuracy (Cook et al., 2011; Reyner and Horne, 2013), and speed (Skein et al., 2011).

Regarding sleep quality, Lastella et al. (2014) use the term 'sleep disruption' to describe periods in which athletes' sleep has been 'partially restricted or fragmented'. In a study on 103 marathon runners' sleep quality on the night before competition, they found that they slept well below the recommended eight to ten hours (Samuels and Alexander, 2013) due to a range of factors including anxiety. However, disrupted sleep did not appear to impact the marathoners' race performance (Lastella et al., 2014). Nonetheless, other studies discuss the importance of appropriate sleep quantity and quality for optimal athletic performance (Marshall and Turner, 2016; Halson, 2008).

Sleep is also considered one of the best forms of recovery for an elite athlete (Copenhaver and Diamond, 2017). In reviewing literature on sleep within youth sport, Taylor et al. (2016) highlight a number of empirical research studies which found that increasing training and 'fixture congestion' among this population can lead to patterns of disturbed sleep and result in athletes' compromising their rest and recovery.

There is a growing literature on the relationship between reduced sleep among athletes and their risk of injury and poor health (Taylor et al., 2016, Copenhaver and Diamond, 2017). For example, in a study of young athletes Milewski et al. (2014) found that those who slept less than eight hours per night had a significantly higher risk of injury compared to those who slept for eight hours or longer. Other studies have shown that sleep deficiency can lead to acute illnesses, traumatic sports injuries and the development of chronic diseases (Copenhaver and Diamond, 2017).

In basketball, Mah et al. (2011) measured the impact of 'sleep extension', i.e. players increasing their sleep over a five- to seven-week period, on performance. Among the 11 players who participated, they found that sleep extension is beneficial in terms of some aspects of basketball performance, particularly speed and accuracy during play. Studies that examined the impact of naps as a mechanism for athletes to counteract the negative effects of partial sleep deprivation have found that, like sleep extension, short sleep spells can improve aspects of athletes' mental and physical performance after partial sleep loss (Waterhouse et al., 2007).

### 3.2.4 Travel

International and domestic travel to competitions and games is common among athletes worldwide. Alongside sports literature on player fatigue and sleep disruption, there is a body of work around the impact of travel on players' levels of stress, fatigue and performance. Much of this research focuses on the effects of airline travel (often across time-zones) on jet-lag and sleep deprivation, which may negatively affect performance (Leatherwood et al., 2012). In Australia, Fowler et al. (2015) simulated the impact of travel on ten physically active males. The athletes participated in a simulated five-hour domestic flight, a 24-hour international flight and a control trial. Not surprisingly, sleep quality and quantity were significantly reduced during the international flight compared to the domestic flight and the control trial. In comparison with the control trial, performance was unchanged by the domestic flight but was significantly reduced by the international flight.

Much of the research on sport and travel tends to focus on the impact of international travel on elite athletes' risk of injury and, more so, illness. Using data gathered from nine rugby teams competing in the Seven World Series 2008/2009 and 2013/2014, Fuller et al. (2015) found that there was no greater risk of injury for players following extensive air travel across multiple times zones. A relationship between travel and illness among athletes is more common. For example, Schweltnus et al. (2012) found a relationship between international travel and players' risk of illness among 259 South African rugby players during the 2010 Super 14 Rugby Union tournament. Specifically, they found a higher incidence of illness in athletes following travel to a foreign country that is more than five time zones away from the home country. Similarly, for cross-country skiers, Svendsen et al. (2016) found that frequent international travel is a major risk factor for illness. They recommend that athletes delay their home-bound flight to prevent illness, and avoid early flights, which can disrupt sleep.

### 3.2.5 Work–life balance

Extensive research has been undertaken on work-life balance, where 'work' relates to paid work and 'life' to family, partner, caring and/or leisure activities (McGinnity, 2014).<sup>47</sup> The main premise behind this concept, which is often used interchangeably with work–life conflict, is that meeting demands in one domain of a person's life, such as work, makes it difficult to meet obligations in other areas, such as family commitments (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Work–life balance is

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<sup>47</sup> Some of the research in this area focuses only on 'work-to-family' conflict; other research has broadened the concept to include other aspects of people's lives, i.e. leisure as well as caring activities (McGinnity, 2014).

used as a measure of quality of life, with the research finding that its absence can have a negative impact on people's marriages, child and family well-being, and child development (Gornick and Meyers, 2003). It has also been found to be associated with decreased job satisfaction, well-being and life satisfaction, and with stress-related conditions such as psychological strain, anxiety and depression, exhaustion and alcohol abuse (Allen et al., 2000).

Connected to the research on player burnout are debates on the extent to which players have work–life balance. It is increasingly acknowledged in the research that having interests outside of sport has multiple benefits for athletes through the broadening of their identity, the development of transferable skills, improving well-being and preventing burnout, all of which can positively impact their performance in sport (McKenzie et al., 2003). Australian research focusing on the non-sporting activities of elite athletes shows, for example, that player participation in non-sporting activities, such as time spent with partners, family, and friends, and in education or employment, positively impacts not only their sporting lives but also their careers and their well-being more generally (Price et al., 2010). In research on elite rugby union players, Cresswell and Eklund (2006) found that those not engaged in something meaningful outside the sport were less likely to experience feelings of accomplishment or self-esteem from other sources, leading to a greater risk of player burnout.

With increasing demands on elite sports players internationally, there is growing concern about the impact of sport on the educational development of athletes, particularly younger men and women. Maintaining 'dual careers' of education, training or work and elite sports has become a policy concern in recent years (European Commission, 2012). Much of this literature comes from the 'rights-based perspective'<sup>48</sup> and the concern that younger athletes' right to education may not be protected where sports coaches or managers place pressure on them to pursue sports goals at the expense of their education (Henry, 2013). Different national contexts have different provisions for student-athletes, with some having a legal requirement for universities to provide adapted opportunities for student-athletes (e.g. Hungary and Spain). Other countries have formal systems (non-legal) that acknowledge student-athletes, and universities make special provision for them (e.g. Belgium, Denmark, Germany); and in some jurisdictions the athletic development needs of the athletes are catered for by the relevant sports organisations. In relation to the latter, in some countries advocates from the sports organisations act on behalf of student-athletes to negotiate flexible arrangements while at university (e.g. Greece, UK), but in other states no formal structures are in

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<sup>48</sup> A discourse in which athletes are seen to be denied access to education and vocational training, which are protected for other workers or citizens (Henry, 2013).

place and responsibility falls on the individual athletes to negotiate agreements with universities (e.g. Ireland and Italy) (Aquilina and Henry, 2010; Henry, 2013).

### 3.2.6 Athletic identity

Athletic identity refers to the degree to which an individual identifies with their role as an athlete (Brewer et al., 1993). Research in this area often focuses on a narrowing of athletes' lives which can impact on their identity development. The findings suggest that where they over-identify with their role as an athlete it is often at the expense of their social development and well-being (Brewer et al., 1993). Athletes' identity is often considered to be linked to health, performance, self-esteem, development of social relationships and confidence, and can be influenced by the values of the sport organisation as well. This can be reinforced by family, friends and even educational institutions, as well as by the athletes themselves. Much of the basis of Coakley's (1992) arguments, which were described earlier, lies in broader theories around player identity: in particular, how players experience 'subverted identity development'<sup>49</sup> during their late adolescence, resulting in loss of a sense of control over their own lives.

It is acknowledged in the literature that athletes with over-developed athletic identities are less prepared for life after their sporting careers (Baillie and Danish, 1992, Lavalee and Robinson, 2007). Known as 'identity foreclosure', it can lead to athletes abandoning academic qualifications, employment opportunities and emotional relationships in order to pursue sporting success (Baillie and Danish, 1992; Brewer et al., 1993). Lavalee and Robinson (2007) argue that athletes struggle not only with the end of their career as elite athletes but also with forming a new identity in the 'real world'. For some athletes, the period of career transition out of their sport can mean a loss of identity and can result in emotional difficulties around this transition. By broadening their identity beyond the sport, studies have shown that athletes may have greater confidence about the future, improved self-esteem, better attitude to others and improvements in their sporting careers (Cresswell and Eklund, 2006; Price et al., 2010).

For students involved in elite sports, a conflict of identity can exist as they try to combine sport with academic studies. Research has examined the extent to which student-athletes' involvement in sport negatively impacts or stunts personal, academic and career development. Much of this research stems from the United States and, in particular, athletes on sports scholarships at university and their capacity to excel at athletics and academics (Simiyu, 2010). A significant part of the literature focuses on athletes who have moved (often away from home) to college

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<sup>49</sup> Whereby young people see no possibility of claiming and socially constructing an identity apart from the identity of athlete (Coakley, 1992).

to train with a college team (Gustafsson et al., 2007).<sup>50</sup> The research suggests that student-athletes are more likely to struggle in adjusting to college life and in making educational decisions and career plans. This results in an athlete-student role conflict, where the demands of the two roles are incompatible (Chartrand and Lent, 1987), and can often lead to poor decision-making (Burns et al., 2013).

Research on levels of academic engagement among elite athletes and their peers identifies internal and external factors influencing the outcomes of student-athletes. First, students' success at college is directly related to the time and effort they put into college-related activities. Simiyu (2010) found that student-athletes' participation in academic pursuits positively affects their overall satisfaction with college, fosters the continuing pursuit of their studies and facilitates personal development. However, the squeeze on their time means that their studies, assignments and attendance can become secondary. Some studies have shown that student-athletes often begin their college career with 'vague or non-existent' career goals while they invest heavily in their athletic roles (Lally and Kerr, 2005). External factors influencing student-athletes' engagement at college or university include access to career guidance, which can help in setting goals and deciding on career options based on their exam results. Other factors include team coaches or managers, and the institutional policies around student absence for travel, matches and training (Simiyu, 2010).

### 3.2.7 Time allocation

Although not directly identified as a player welfare issue in the literature, the actual amount of time (in hours/minutes) that athletes allocate to their sport will affect their well-being, and may contribute to some of the player welfare issues identified in this chapter (player burnout, work-life balance, sleep (and, consequently, injuries and performance levels), etc.). However, there is a dearth of research on time allocation among athletes, with only two studies found in the course of this research.

The first of the two was the United States National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) GOALS (Growth, Opportunities, Aspirations and Learning of Students in College) study. The NCAA undertakes regular research on the experiences and well-being of current NCAA student-athletes. Included in this is an examination of time commitments among student-athletes across a range of sports, including American football and basketball (NCAA, 2016). Their most recent findings suggest an increase in the median (in-season) time spent on athletics by both males and females over time: athletes in the very top division, Division 1, reported spending

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<sup>50</sup> As distinct from Gaelic athletes, who often study in one location and return to their home county to train/play.

a median time of 32 hours per week participating in athletics in 2010 compared to 34 hours per week in 2015; this varied slightly by the type of sport. However, the study highlights as well that student-athletes are devoting more time to their academic studies over time too. The NCAA study (2016) also examined athletes' views about work–life balance and, in this regard, found that the majority of athletes (highest in Division I) wished to have opportunities to visit home/family and more time for relaxation and social time.

In her research on the factors influencing elite athletes in Australia, Grace (2016) indicated that Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) elite athletes train a minimum of 25 hours a week. Grace highlights the importance of acknowledging passages of time that lie outside athletes' training and performance time. Specifically, she argues that time allocation studies for athletes not only should focus on formal activities and informally scheduled training activities, but should also take account of the time spent by athletes performing certain expected practices outside of formal training, such as diet and sleep (Grace, 2016).

### **3.3 GAELIC GAMES LITERATURE**

Player burnout and work–life balance have been dominant themes in research on Gaelic players over the past 15 years. This section specifically examines existing research on player welfare, focusing on a number of areas including their commitment to the sport, mental health issues, risk-behaviours among players and athletic identity. Several sports medicine studies have examined the epidemiology of sports injuries among Gaelic players, including O'Conner et al. (2016, 2017), Blake et al. (2014), Murphy et al. (2012) and O'Malley et al. (2014). This strand of Gaelic games research is not discussed in the literature review presented in this chapter as its focus is different to that of the examination of injuries conducted in this report.

In early 2007, the GAA established a taskforce to examine the issue of player burnout, the work of which was published towards the end of that year (GAA, 2007). The report brought together research and data on player burnout from studies across different sporting activities. It recommended a range of proposals to minimise the problems arising from burnout among Gaelic players, particularly younger players, while ensuring that 'players' needs are catered for in the most holistic way possible' (p. 15). Since 2007, the GAA has published other work on player burnout, most recently in 2015. Again, this report made a number of recommendations, as well as reiterating measures proposed in earlier reports, to address overtraining and burnout among players aged 17 to 21 (GAA, 2015).

Stemming from Coakley's (1992) research, Hughes and Hassan (2015) examine player burnout in relation to Gaelic athletes and the social world they inhabit in

Ireland. This study points to the unique social context of the GAA in Ireland and highlights the complexity of power relations between Gaelic players and ‘key authority figures’ in the GAA and in players’ lives more generally. They argue that players are powerless, and that their ongoing powerlessness has led to a greater susceptibility to burnout. The authors points to a failure within the GAA to assess the needs of its players and a failure among players to understand how to introduce any meaningful change (Hughes and Hassan, 2015).

In line with much of the US literature around demands and commitments among elite college athletes, Ní Cheallaigh (2017) examined the demands on amateur athletes in the GAA. Using data from six qualitative interviews with Gaelic football and hurling players, she found that male inter-county Gaelic players are ‘constantly conflicted due to their commitment to their sport’ (p. 32). She points to the need for psychological support structures and practices within the GAA which could protect players from negative responses to transitions, stressors and other adversities during their careers, including their retirement from playing.

Focusing specifically on third-level students as a sub-group of Gaelic players, Lane (2015) also examined demands and commitments among players on senior inter-county teams. Using information gathered from GPA surveys,<sup>51</sup> student scholarship questionnaires<sup>52</sup> and student workshops,<sup>53</sup> in addition to qualitative feedback from stakeholders (including academic staff, GAA officials, and third-level and county managers), she found that half of those surveyed were overwhelmed by their commitments and over half reported that they would like to give more time to their studies. Forty per cent of those surveyed had to repeat exams and 14 per cent had to repeat the entire year, compared to just 6 per cent of all students as reported by the Higher Education Authority (HEA). Lane (2015) noted the level of pressure and demand, particularly among those playing inter-county football and hurling while in college, as they are often on multiple teams with club, county and college.

Dealing with the issue of sports and mental health, Goutteborge et al. (2016) sought to examine the prevalence, comorbidity and incidence of CMDs among Gaelic players in 2014/2015. They found a relatively high prevalence and incidence of symptoms of CMD among a sample of 204 Gaelic players, which they conclude is associated with ‘severe musculoskeletal injuries, surgeries, recent life events, and sport career dissatisfaction’ (p. 6). They highlight the importance of raising

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<sup>51</sup> The sample consisted of 1,636 students: the number of students that completed the GPA’s annual survey between 2012 and 2015.

<sup>52</sup> 1,049 players responded to the student scholarship in 2012 and 2013. Added to this was the number of players who completed the 2014–2015 questionnaire: 479 students, giving a total sample of 1,528.

<sup>53</sup> 214 students took part in ten student workshops, which were carried out in 2014.

awareness among stakeholders in Gaelic sports about the most common mental disorders among athletes. Like Ní Cheallaigh (2017), they also suggest the introduction of preventative and support measures going forward (Gouttebarga et al., 2016).

Focusing more specifically on risk-behaviours among Gaelic players, O'Farrell et al. (2010) examined the issue of alcohol misuse. The self-reported study sought to examine the prevalence of binge-drinking and alcohol-related harms among players by using an Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT) score. The findings show that alcohol use was high among GAA players compared to males in the general population of a similar age. Specifically, over half (54.3 per cent) of those surveyed stated that they binge-drink at least once a week compared to 40 per cent of males of a similar age in the general population. Although it may be expected that sports people drink less than the general population, the authors highlight how these findings are in line with research internationally which shows that highly active sports people are more likely to binge-drink compared to non-sports people. The study also found that alcohol-related harms were twice as high among Gaelic players compared to the general population (31.5 per cent compared to 15 per cent).



## CHAPTER 4

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### Research methodology and data

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we set out the approach used in this research to identify the commitments required to play senior inter-county and the impact that this is having on players' personal and professional lives and club involvement. The data used in the report, which come from the *Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016* (SSICP-2016), are also described. An overview of the methods used to analyse these data is outlined as well.

#### 4.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The GPA gathers data on inter-county players through their membership forms, which include information on players' needs and well-being (Lane, 2015). In addition, through the GPA Student Scholarship application process, it collects data on third-level inter-county players' college experiences while playing inter-county (Lane, 2015). The GAA also collects information on inter-county players; specifically injury data, which are gathered through the National GAA Injury Surveillance Database. While each of these data sources offers valuable insights on Gaelic players and their well-being, the data were not comprehensive enough to allow for a detailed examination of the experiences of being a senior inter-county player. Given this, the first step in the research presented in this report was to design a questionnaire that would allow us to address the objectives of the study, as set out in Chapter 1. There were three main strands to the development of this questionnaire, as follows.

- 1. Consultative research:** First, an Oversight Body was established. This group consisted of a GAA representative, a GPA representative, a former inter-county hurler, a former inter-county footballer, three academics with GAA backgrounds, and an ESRI research professor acting as chair.<sup>54</sup> This committee was consulted at various stages throughout the research process; in particular, to provide comment and feedback on the design of the player questionnaire

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<sup>54</sup> The Oversight Body members were as follows: Siobhan Earley, formerly Head of Player Development at the GPA; Ger Ryan, formerly the GAA's Medical, Scientific and Welfare Committee's Chairperson; Diarmuid Lyng, former Wexford hurler; Ronan Carolan, former Cavan footballer; John Considine, University College Cork and former inter-county player and manager; Niall Moyna, Dublin City University and Gaelic football manager; and Eamon O'Shea, National University of Ireland Galway and former inter-county player and manager. The body was chaired by Kieran McQuinn, Research Professor at the ESRI.

and the research findings.

In addition, at the first meeting in January 2017 the Oversight Body suggested that other key stakeholders involved in player welfare be consulted about this research: specifically, (i) 2016 senior inter-county managers, (ii) County Board Secretaries and (iii) third-level Games Development Officers (GDOs). Consequently, workshops were held with each of these groups to get their insights and views on player welfare among senior inter-county players. A summary of the GDO workshop, which took place in Dublin in March 2017, is presented in Appendix B (Section B.1). The material from the separate manager and county-board secretary workshops,<sup>55</sup> which were conducted in September and October 2017, forms a separate forthcoming publication.

Aside from the manager workshops, each 2016 manager was contacted by the ESRI at the beginning of February 2017 to inform them of the research work: specifically, (i) context and purpose of the research, (ii) the approaches being used to gather the player welfare information and (iii) the potential impacts of the research on one of their training sessions in February/March 2017,<sup>56</sup> which was when the player workshops (discussed below) were conducted. Managers were also informed that all steps would be taken to minimise any disruptions to their training plans from this research work.

2. **Desk-based research:** After the appointment of the Oversight Body, the second step in the design of the player survey was to conduct a review of the national and international research that has examined player welfare issues: a summary of some of the findings from this work was presented in Chapter 3. In undertaking this literature review, we wanted to identify if there were any sports similar to Gaelic Games in that the players are amateurs, but their sport is played at a high level and, therefore, players are required to be very dedicated. If we were successful in doing this, we then wanted to establish what player welfare issues arose in these similar sports so that this information could be used to assist in the design of the senior inter-county player questionnaire. However, when we conducted this review we found that, given the unique nature of Gaelic games as amateur sports, we could draw on very

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<sup>55</sup> The GAA contacted the 2016 inter-county managers and county-board secretaries in January 2017 seeking their participation in the research. Those that did not want to be contacted by the ESRI were asked to inform the GAA by a certain date: no manager or county-board secretary opted out of the research.

<sup>56</sup> A maximum of three players would potentially be absent from a training session the evening of a player workshop. As it transpired, very few teams had three players present at the workshops (see the 'Qualitative Research' section, and Appendix B.2, for further details on the player workshops).

little of the international research in developing the players' questionnaire.<sup>57</sup>

- 3. Qualitative research:** Given the outcome of the desk-based research, the design of the SSICP-2016 questionnaire was, for the most part, driven by Gaelic players themselves. Specifically, player workshops were conducted in the four provinces in February and March 2017, with three players from each of the 2016 senior inter-county hurling and Gaelic football panels invited to attend to discuss their experiences of playing inter-county. Players were randomly selected for the workshops on the basis of age: a young (aged 18–23), a middle-aged (24–27) and an older (28+) player. This selection method was used in order to identify the impact of playing senior inter-county according to a player's life stage. For example, student players may experience different effects of playing senior inter-county compared to those who are working, as may those who are single relative to those who are married.

In each workshop, players were asked to discuss:

1. the commitments required to play senior inter-county;
2. the main areas of their lives affected by playing at this level;
3. the positive and negative impacts of playing senior inter-county hurling/football;
4. the impact of playing at this level on their club involvement.

A summary of the discussions that took place at the player workshops is presented in Appendix B (Section B.2).

### 4.3 SURVEY OF SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS 2016 DATA

As indicated in Section 4.2, the information gathered at each of the four player workshops resulted in the development of the SSICP-2016 questionnaire. This survey consisted of a series of questions under each of the following headings:

1. Inter-county playing information;
2. Overview of inter-county experiences;
3. Education experiences;

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<sup>57</sup> The only piece of research that was useful in the design of the SSICP-2016 questionnaire was the 2016 NCAA GOALS study, which examined the experiences and well-being of 2015 student-athletes in the United States. Although not identical, NCAA athletes are similar to Gaelic players in that they are also amateurs.

4. Employment experiences in 2016;
5. Health and well-being;
6. Personal and family background;
7. Club experiences;
8. Time commitments;
9. Other commitments;
10. Opportunity for additional feedback and comments.

In total, 1,947 males played senior inter-county hurling or football in 2016.<sup>58</sup> The GPA contacted all of these players in January 2017 to seek their participation in the research. If players did not want to participate in the study, they were asked to inform the GPA by a certain time. Only one player chose not to take part in the study at this stage.

From the remaining 1,946 players, 50 were randomly selected to pilot the SSICP-2016 questionnaire in April 2017. Fourteen of these players completed the pilot questionnaire in full: these players were subsequently exempt from completing the final version of the questionnaire. The player questionnaire was finalised in May 2017 and was administered to the remaining 2016 senior inter-county player population (1,932) between 29 May and 25 August 2017.

The SSICP-2016 data were gathered by Behaviour & Attitudes (B&A) using a multi-mode approach: players could complete the questionnaire online, on paper or by telephone.<sup>59</sup> An incentive scheme was put in place to encourage the players to complete the questionnaire.<sup>60</sup> This was supported by various communication campaigns throughout the fieldwork phase of the research.<sup>61</sup> In addition, each inter-county team's GPA team representative was contacted in order to give the player an outline of the research and to ask him to encourage his teammates to complete the questionnaire. Direct contact was also made with teams as they were

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<sup>58</sup> This figure excludes the Fingal, Lancashire, London and Warwickshire hurling teams, and the London and New York football teams.

<sup>59</sup> The majority of players who completed the questionnaire did so online: 86.9 per cent, with 12.3 per cent completing a paper questionnaire and the remaining 0.8 per cent responding by telephone.

<sup>60</sup> The first prize was a pair of return flights to the United States; the second a weekend for two in the Croke Park Hotel; the third a €250 One4All gift voucher; and the fourth and fifth prizes were respectively a pair of All-Ireland hurling and football final tickets. If players completed the questionnaire by a certain date, their name was entered into the prize draw twice.

<sup>61</sup> The two associations sent a joint letter to inter-county managers to encourage their players to complete the questionnaire. Twitter was used as well, as was communication through a newspaper article on the study, a panel discussion on player welfare on one of the national radio stations and WhatsApp.

knocked out of the 2017 championship, as it was with 2016 players who were no longer playing in 2017.

As can be seen from Table 4.1, of the 1,932 players that were administered the final version of the questionnaire, 993 completed it in full and 44 partially completed it,<sup>62</sup> giving a response rate of 53.7 per cent.<sup>63</sup> This is a very satisfactory survey response rate, particularly given the extra commitments that this cohort of individuals have from playing senior inter-county. For instance, in a study of over 100 telephone surveys conducted by leading survey organisations in the United States between 1996 and 2005, Holbrook et al. (2008) found that in 77 per cent of the surveys response rates ranged from 20 per cent to 50 per cent. Closer to home, the Irish School Leavers Surveys used a similar design to that used for the *Survey of Senior Inter County Players 2016*. The last such survey, the *2007 School Leavers Survey*, was conducted in 2007 with a group of young adults who had left second-level school two years earlier. A multimode approach was taken to the fieldwork, including the option to complete the survey by web, by post, by telephone or through face-to-face contact with an interviewer. The response rate was 54 per cent overall, but would have been only 42 per cent without the face-to-face interview component (Byrne et al., 2008).

**TABLE 4.1 SURVEY OF SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS 2016 (SSICP-2016): QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE OVERVIEW**

	Number	Response Rate (%)
<b>Full population of 2016 senior inter-county players</b>	<b>1,947</b>	
Chose not to participate in research	1	
Completed pilot questionnaire	14	
<b>Administered final version of questionnaire</b>	<b>1,932</b>	
Completed questionnaire in full	993	
Completed questionnaire partially	44	
<b>Total for analysis</b>	<b>1,037</b>	<b>53.7</b>

Source: Authors' own calculations.

In conducting the research, we found that 600 2016 inter-county players were no longer playing in 2017,<sup>64</sup> which is 31 per cent of the 2016 player population. The reasons why players ceased playing at the end of the 2016 season are examined in Chapter 6. Among this sub-group, 43 per cent completed the player questionnaire

<sup>62</sup> Those who partially completed the questionnaire were included in the analyses for which they provided responses.

<sup>63</sup> Response rates by code (i.e. hurling and football) and playing level (Division 1, Division 2, etc. for football, and MacCarthy Cup, Christy Ring, etc. for hurling) are presented in Appendix B (Section B.3).

<sup>64</sup> These players were identified with the assistance of the GPA team representatives and the GAA.

(Table 4.2).<sup>65</sup>**TABLE 4.2 SURVEY OF SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS 2016 (SSICP-2016) QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE OVERVIEW: PLAYERS WHO CEASED PLAYING AT THE END OF 2016 SEASON**

	Response Rate
Completed questionnaire in full	39.6
Completed questionnaire partially	3.2
Completed questionnaire – total	42.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>600</b>

Source: Authors' own calculations.

In any survey with less than a full response, it is important to check whether the completed sample is representative of the population: in this case, the population of all 2016 senior inter-county players. This is typically done by constructing a weight variable, which is then applied to all analyses in order to ensure that the results presented are representative of the full population being examined. In this research, this weight variable was created using 2016 GPA player population data, along with other data gathered during the course of the research.<sup>66</sup> Specifically, the population data used to create the player weight were: (i) code (hurling or football), (ii) playing level (national division for football and championship cup for hurling), (iii) geographic location, (iv) principal economic status (PES) and (v) playing status (i.e. 2016 only or still playing in 2017). When we checked the completed sample against these characteristics, we found that the overall representativeness of the players who completed the questionnaire was good and that weighting the analyses made very little difference to the results.

For most of the SSICP-2016 variables that are examined in the report, there is very little item non-response. Specifically, none of the variables had more than 5 per cent of relevant information missing (see Appendix B, Section B.4).

#### 4.4 ANALYSIS APPROACH

In the next four chapters, Chapters 5 to 7, we present a descriptive examination of the experiences of being a senior inter-county Gaelic player with the intention of providing some insights into:

<sup>65</sup> In following up with this group of players, we found that 3 per cent had emigrated, some of whom completed the questionnaire.

<sup>66</sup> Identification of 2016 players who ceased playing in 2017.

1. the commitments required to play at this level;
2. the impact that playing senior inter-county has on players' personal and professional lives;
3. the effect that playing at this level has on players' club involvement.

As indicated previously, the analysis is based on 2016 senior inter-county players. On the basis of the competition and playing season information presented in Chapter 2 (Section 2.1), this group of players would have trained with their county team from November 2015 (in preparation for the pre-season) until their team was knocked out of the championship (or won it) in 2016. This would have commenced from mid-June onwards.

These 2016 players would have played with their local club team during 2016 as well. However, most senior inter-county players have only minor involvement, at least in terms of training, with their club team until their county team exits the championship. Such club engagement is also examined in this report, specifically for the inter-county championship period (i.e. late May/June 2016).

The analysis presented in the main body of the report focuses on the situation for *all* senior inter-county players. However, given that the skills associated with playing hurling and football differ, there may be variation in the experiences of playing senior inter-county by code (i.e., hurling and football). This is also true for age and life stage. For example, a player in their mid to late twenties may have different career, family, etc. commitments compared to a player in their thirties or early twenties, which may result in players having a different experience of playing senior inter-county. There may also be variation on the basis of the level that the player is playing at: for example, a top-tiered Division 1 footballer or MacCarthy Cup hurler compared to someone who plays in one of the lower football divisions or hurling cup competitions. Therefore, disaggregated analyses by code (i.e., hurling and football separately), age group (18–21, 22–25, 26–30 and 31 and above) and playing level (the 2016 national league structure for footballers and the championship cup structure for hurlers)<sup>67</sup> are provided as well. These additional examinations are predominantly provided in appendices, but noteworthy differences are also included in the main body of the report. For some of the analyses undertaken, we also compare players resident within their home county with those living away. The reason for this is, again, that players who have to travel from outside their home county for training/games may have a different inter-county experience compared to players resident within. Analysis is not possible at

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<sup>67</sup> See Appendix B (Section B.5) for a list of the teams in each football division (Divisions 1 to 4) and hurling championship cup (MacCarthy Cup, Christy Ring Cup, Nicky Rackard Cup and Lory Meagher Cup) in 2016.

county level, due to the small number of cases at that level of disaggregation and also to protect respondents' anonymity.

For the time commitment analyses presented in Chapter 5, some amendments had to be made to the data before the analyses could be conducted. The details of the data checks and amendments undertaken are set out in Appendix C (Sections C1–C5).

Some readers of this report may be used to seeing tests of significance and confidence intervals presented with research results. Such tests are appropriate when the analysis is based on a random sample of the individuals we are researching. For instance, we might select a random sample of Gaelic players with lower limb injuries and we are interested in making inferences to all Gaelic players with these injuries. In this situation, different random samples of the group of individuals of interest may yield slightly different statistics (i.e. differences in means, proportions or regression coefficients). Confidence intervals and significance tests are a way of understanding how large this difference is likely to be, so that we can say that in 95 per cent<sup>68</sup> of samples of this size and design, we would expect the mean to be in this range.

In this report, however, we sought to interview all 2016 senior inter-county players, and not a random sample. Thus, tests of significance and confidence intervals are not appropriate as we are not generalising from a random sample to the population. There may be other issues with our completed set of interviews with senior inter-county players, since not all of them completed the survey. These issues, such as incomplete coverage or non-response, cannot be addressed by statistical tests and confidence intervals but must be addressed by checking the representativeness of the completed sample. As indicated previously, though, it would appear that non-response and incomplete coverage did not seriously impact on the representativeness of the players who completed the survey, as the weight that we created to address representativeness made very little difference to the results derived using the unweighted player population data that was collected. This, combined with a relatively high response rate for a difficult-to-reach group such as this, provides reassurance as to the quality of the research.

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<sup>68</sup> The conventional level of significance in social science research uses significance tests at the 5 per cent level and 95 per cent confidence intervals.



## CHAPTER 5

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### Commitments involved in playing senior inter-county Gaelic games

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Based on the player workshops, *time* is one of the main commitments required of Gaelic players to play senior inter-county. Given this, in this chapter we examine the amount of time that 2016 players devoted to pitch-based and sports conditioning sessions during the championship, along with time spent travelling to and from such training and time spent on gear/food preparation.<sup>69</sup> We focused on these substantive time duties as it was not feasible to include an exhaustive list of each inter-county task that players allocate time to (completing daily electronic diaries on sleep, rest, heart rate, nutrition, etc.). Thus, the time commitment information presented in this report is a baseline measure of players' inter-county time commitments. We also analyse individually instigated training sessions and time spent with other Gaelic teams that players were involved with during the championship.

This time commitment has implications for areas of players' lives outside of Gaelic games. To get an insight into this, we investigate how the amount of time that players devoted to their inter-county commitments on a pitch-based training day compared with time spent on professional commitments, sleep and with their family, partners, friends, generally relaxing/downtime and other activities.

As mentioned, all the analyses in the chapter are based on the championship playing season as this is when most players would want to be at their peak and, therefore, is the period when they are most likely to be devoting maximum time to their inter-county commitments. Nevertheless, we also investigate how players' inter-county time commitments during the championship compared with both the pre-season and national league. Whether players had any time off from Gaelic games during 2016, and their levels of satisfaction with the inter-county training to game ratio, are issues that are examined in this chapter as well.

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<sup>69</sup> Food preparation time is different for Gaelic players compared to the general population, as good nutrition is critical for optimal athletic performance and recovery. Therefore, players need to spend time preparing, and fuelling their body with, good-quality food.

## 5.2 TIME AND TRAINING COMMITMENTS<sup>70</sup>

### 5.2.1 Inter-county training

Players were asked to picture a typical week day (Monday to Friday) during the 2016 championship (late May/June) when they had an organised inter-county ‘field-based’ training session and to indicate how many hours they spent on the following activities.

	Championship (late May/June 2016)
<b>a. Professional (Paid Work/Study) Commitments:</b> (including travelling to and from your home/accommodation and work/college)	_____ hours /per day
<b>b. GAA Commitments:</b>	
<b>i. Organised inter-county ‘field-based’ training session</b> (include team meetings, psychology talks, video analysis, rehabilitation, prehabilitation, active recovery, post-training meals, etc.)	_____ hours /per day
<b>ii. Travelling</b> between your home/accommodation or work/college <b>to and from</b> county training	_____ hours /per day
<b>iii. Gear and/or food preparation</b>	_____ hours /per day
<b>c. Other:</b> (including spending time with family, partner, friends and relaxing/downtime)	_____ hours /per day
<b>d. Sleeping:</b>	_____ hours /per day
<b>Total:</b>	<b>24 Hours</b>

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

They were also asked about:

- (i) the number of hours that they spent on an average organised inter-county ‘non-field-based’ sports conditioning training session (excluding individual self-motivated training sessions) during the 2016 championship; and
- (ii) the number of hours that they spent travelling between their home/accommodation or work/college to and from the location where they undertook this training.

On average, we found that players allocated 6.1 hours on a typical weekday training day (i.e. Monday to Friday) during the championship to their inter-county commitments: 2.9 hours to their pitch-based training, 2.1 hours to travelling to and from this training and 1.1 hours on food and gear preparation (Table 5.1). This equated to players allocating 25 per cent of such a day to their inter-county training

<sup>70</sup> See Appendix C (Sections C.1–C.5) for checks undertaken on, and subsequent restrictions made to, the SSICP-2016 data when deriving the information presented in this chapter.

commitments.

In relation to the 2.9 hours that players devoted to their pitch-based training, this information does not relate solely to the field component of the session, but also includes time spent on prehabilitation, rehabilitation, active recovery, team meetings, psychology talks, video analysis, training meals, etc.<sup>71</sup>

**TABLE 5.1 2016 PLAYERS' INTER-COUNTY TRAINING TIME COMMITMENTS DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP (LATE MAY/JUNE)**

	Trained (%)	Average Number of Hours per Day			Total (Hours)	Proportion of Day (%)
		Training	Travel	Gear/Food Preparation		
<b>1. Field-based day (Monday–Friday)</b>						
All Players	100	2.9	2.1	1.1	6.1	25.2
Resident within county	100	2.9	1.8	1.1	5.8	24.3
Resident outside county	100	2.6	3.0	1.0	6.7	27.9
<b>2A. Sports conditioning day (Monday–Sunday): match week</b>						
All Players	91.6	1.6	1.8	1.1	4.6	19.0
Resident within county	91.2	1.6	1.7	1.2	4.4	18.4
Resident outside county	92.7	1.6	2.4	1.0	5.0	20.9
<b>2B. Sports conditioning day (Monday–Sunday): non-match week</b>						
All Players	95.3	2.0	1.8	1.1	5.0	20.8
Resident within county	94.7	2.0	1.7	1.1	4.9	20.2
Resident outside county	97.2	1.9	2.4	1.1	5.4	22.5

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Not surprisingly, players resident outside of their home county – 24 per cent of 2016 players – were found to spend more time travelling to and from their pitch-based training sessions: an average of 3 hours compared to 1.8 hours for players resident within their home county. This resulted in these players devoting 28 per cent of a field-based training day to their inter-county commitments. This compares with 24 per cent for players resident within their home county (Table 5.1).

<sup>71</sup> More detailed analysis on the time devoted to inter-county field-based training sessions is presented in Section 5.3 below. For a more comprehensive examination of the amount of time spent travelling to and from field-based training and on gear/food preparation, see Appendix C (Sections C.6 and C.7).

In relation to sports conditioning, 92 per cent of players undertook such training the week of an inter-county match, rising to 95 per cent during weeks when there was no match.

During a championship match week, players allocated 4.6 hours on a sports conditioning training day to their sports conditioning: 1.6 hours on the actual session, 1.8 hours travelling to and from this training and 1.1 hours on gear and food preparation.<sup>72</sup> This analysis highlights that players spent as much time travelling to and from the location of their sports conditioning session (1.8 hours) as they did on the session itself (1.6 hours).<sup>73</sup>

The total time allocation of 4.6 hours equated to players spending almost a fifth (19 per cent) of a sports conditioning training day on such inter-county training. Once again, this percentage was higher for players' resident outside of their home county – 21 per cent compared to 18 per cent for those dwelling within, again due to the time taken to travel to and from the training location.

From a comparison of the time spent travelling to and from a pitch-based session with that of a sports conditioning session, it would appear that almost all 2016 players resident within their home county, and a good proportion of those living away, travelled to their county team training base to undertake their sports conditioning sessions: the time taken to travel to and from pitch and sports conditioning sessions was 1.8 and 1.7 hours respectively for those resident within their home county, while it was 3 and 2.4 hours respectively for those dwelling away.

During a week in which players had no inter-county championship match, the amount of time that they allocated to a sports conditioning session increased from 1.6 hours to 2 hours. This resulted in their overall inter-county time commitment on such a training day rising to 5 hours from 4.6 hours. Percentage-wise, this equated to 21 per cent of their day. For players resident outside of their home county it was 23 per cent, while for those living within the county it was 20 per cent.

We have no comparative training day time information for other amateur athletes

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<sup>72</sup> We did not specifically ask players about the amount of time that they devoted to food and gear preparation on a sports conditioning training day. However, it would be fair to assume that, given the level that these players train and play at, they are likely to devote as much time on such a training day to their food and gear preparation as they are on a field-based training day. Therefore, the sports conditioning training day food/gear preparation information that is presented in Table 5.1 is derived from the pitch-based training day information (for the sub-sample of players that undertook sports conditioning).

<sup>73</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of the amount of time that these players devoted to their sports conditioning sessions, along with the time taken to travel to and from these sessions, see Appendix C (Sections C.8 and C.9).

to compare senior inter-county players' training day time commitments with. One would expect, though, that given the time commitments identified here – between 4.6 hours (match week sports conditioning training day) and 6.1 hours (pitch-based training day) – senior inter-county players are likely to be at the upper end of the training time allocation spectrum among amateur sports people.

However, we know that senior inter-county players do not undertake only one pitch-based and one sports conditioning session per week. Thus, they are allocating more time to playing senior inter-county than that already identified here (6.1 hours for a pitch-based session and 4.6 (5) hours to a sports conditioning session during a match (non-match) week).

We can see from Table 5.2 that, on average, players undertook 2.4 field-based training sessions the week of a championship match, with the number increasing to 3 sessions during weeks when there was no match. In relation to sports conditioning, players who undertook such sessions completed 1.5 sessions the week of an inter-county match (92 per cent of players), increasing to 1.9 sessions during weeks when there was no match (95 per cent of players). In total, 2016 players engaged in an average of 3.9 inter-county training sessions during weeks in which they had a match, and an average of 4.9 sessions during weeks in which they had no game.<sup>74</sup>

**TABLE 5.2 AVERAGE NUMBER OF SENIOR INTER-COUNTY TRAINING SESSIONS DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP**

	Average Number of Sessions per Week (Monday–Sunday)
<b>Field-based</b>	
Match week	2.4
Non-match week	3.0
<b>Sports conditioning</b>	
Match week	1.5
Non-match week	1.9
	<b>Total Sessions Monday to Sunday (Average)</b>
Match week	3.9
Non-match week	4.9

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Combining the training time and session information, we can see from Table 5.3 that, on average, players devoted 14.5 hours to pitch-based training sessions the

<sup>74</sup> For a more comprehensive examination of the number of both pitch-based and sports conditioning sessions that 2016 players undertook per week, see Appendix C (Section C.10).

week of an inter-county championship match. This figure increased to 18.2 hours during weeks in which they had no match.

For players who undertook sports conditioning as well as pitch-based sessions (see Table 5.1), their weekly inter-county training time commitments were 21.4 hours the week of a match, increasing to 27.6 hours during weeks in which there was no game.

During weeks in which players had no championship match, the third field-based training session is likely to have taken place on weekends. Thus, the amount of time taken to travel to and from this session is likely to be lower for a proportion of players resident outside of their home county during the week (i.e. Monday to Friday), as some players often return to dwell within their home county at weekends. Consequently, such players would have a shorter distance to travel to their pitch-based session at the weekends and would, therefore, not be spending 3 hours travelling to and from their training (Table 5.1). This is likely to reduce slightly the average amount of time that we have identified for players allocating to their inter-county training on such weeks (18.2 hours). However, this reduction is likely to be countered by the duration of the training session itself being longer on a weekend. In fact, the average hours identified for an inter-county non-match week (18.2 and 27.6 hours for field-based only and field-based and sports conditioning sessions respectively) are likely to be greater for this reason.

It is important to note as well that the time commitments for players the week of an inter-county match will be greater than the average training time commitments identified here – 14.5 hours for those who undertook a field-based session only and 21.4 hours for players who undertook both field-based and sports conditioning sessions – as we have not accounted for the number of hours players will have devoted to their inter-county commitments on the day of their game.

**TABLE 5.3 2016 PLAYERS' AVERAGE WEEKLY INTER-COUNTY TRAINING TIME COMMITMENTS DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP (LATE MAY/JUNE)**

	Average Number of Sessions per Week	Daily Time Allocation (Hours)	Average Number of Hours per Week
<b>Field-based</b>			
Inter-county match week	2.4	6.1	14.5
Inter-county non-match week	3.0	6.1	18.2
<b>Sports conditioning</b>			
Inter-county match week	1.5	4.6	6.8
Inter-county non-match week	1.9	5.0	9.5
	<b>Average Number of Hours per Week</b>		
	<b>Inter-county match week</b>		<b>Inter-county non-match week</b>
<b>Inter-county training type</b>			
Field-based only	14.5		18.2
Field-based and sports conditioning	21.4		27.6

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

### 5.2.2 Individually instigated training

Seventy-seven per cent of players indicated that they engaged in individually instigated (i.e. self-motivated) training sessions the week of an inter-county match (Table 5.4). This broke down into 72 per cent undertaking such a session in combination with both inter-county pitch-based and sports conditioning sessions, and 5 per cent engaging in inter-county field-based trainings only in conjunction with their own self-motivated sessions.

During weeks in which players had no championship match, 87 per cent undertook self-led sessions: 83 per cent in combination with both inter-county pitch and sports conditioning sessions, and 3 per cent with pitch-based only trainings.

While information on the nature of the self-motivated training was not requested, some players may have chosen to undertake additional sports conditioning work, while others may have focussed on honing ball skills for their respective game in their individually-led training.

**TABLE 5.4 2016 PLAYERS' AVERAGE WEEKLY INDIVIDUALLY INSTIGATED TRAINING SESSION TIME COMMITMENTS DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP**

Individually instigated (self-motivated) training	Trained (%)	Session Duration (Hours)	Average Number of Sessions per Week <sup>1</sup>	Average Number of Hours per Week
Inter-county match week	77.3	1.4	1.5	2.1
Inter-county non-match week	86.6	1.7	1.9	3.2

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: <sup>1</sup> Monday to Sunday.

The average duration of an individually instigated training session was 1.4 hours the week of a match, increasing to 1.7 hours during weeks in which players had no game (Table 5.4).

The average number of such sessions that players undertook was 1.5 the week of a championship game and 1.9 during weeks in which there was no match.<sup>75</sup>

For players who engaged in individually instigated trainings, such sessions increased their training time commitments by 2.1 hours the week of a match and by 3.2 hours during weeks in which they had no match.

This means that for players who undertook self-led training in combination with both inter-county pitch-based and sports conditioning sessions, their weekly training time commitment during weeks in which they had an inter-county match was 23.5 hours. This rose to 30.8 hours for weeks in which they had no championship game (Table 5.5).

<sup>75</sup> See Appendix C (Section C.11) for a more detailed analysis of the number and duration of individually instigated training sessions that 2016 players undertook.



**TABLE 5.5 2016 PLAYERS' AVERAGE WEEKLY INTER-COUNTY AND INDIVIDUALLY INSTIGATED TRAINING SESSION TIME COMMITMENTS DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP**

Session type	Average Number of Hours per Week			
	Inter-County Match Week (Average Hours)	Applicable to (%):	Inter-County Non-Match Week (Average Hours)	Applicable to (%):
IC field-based only	14.5	3.2	18.2	1.2
IC field-based and sports conditioning only	21.4	19.6	27.6	12.1
IC field-based only and individually instigated	16.6	5.4	21.4	3.4
IC field-based and sports conditioning and individually instigated	23.5	71.9	30.8	83.2

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: IC = Inter-County.

### 5.2.3 Other Gaelic team training

Thirty-three per cent of players indicated that they trained/played with their other Gaelic team during an inter-county championship match week (Table 5.6). As the time of year that this information was requested for was late May/June, the *club* would have been the other Gaelic team that most players would have been involved with at that stage.<sup>76</sup> Eighty-eight per cent of this subgroup of players also undertook their inter-county pitch and sport conditioning sessions, with the remaining 12 per cent taking part in only the county pitch-based sessions.<sup>77</sup>

**TABLE 5.6 2016 PLAYERS' AVERAGE WEEKLY OTHER GAELIC TEAM TRAINING SESSION TIME COMMITMENTS DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP**

Other Gaelic team training	Trained (%)	Session Duration (Hours)	Average Number of Sessions per Week <sup>1</sup>	Average Number of Hours per Week
Inter-county match week	32.7	1.9	2.1	4.0
Inter-county non-match week	61.0	1.9	2.1	4.0

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: <sup>1</sup> Monday to Sunday.

This proportion increased to 61 per cent during weeks when there was no inter-county match. Of this cohort, 94 per cent also undertook their inter-county field-based and sport conditioning sessions, with the other 6 per cent partaking in only

<sup>76</sup> Some players indicated that they were also playing with defence force Gaelic teams (army, Garda, etc.) during late May/June 2016, while other players indicated that they were dual club players i.e. they played both hurling and Gaelic football with their club.

<sup>77</sup> Of the group of players that undertook their inter-county field-based and sports conditioning sessions, a small percentage (18 per cent) also engaged in their own (i.e. self-motivated) training session the week of a championship game.

the county pitch trainings.<sup>78</sup>

The average duration of this other Gaelic team training/match session was 1.9 hours. This was the case regardless of whether the training/game took place during an inter-county championship match or non-match week.

The average number of such sessions per week was 2.1. Again, this figure remained the same irrespective of whether the other Gaelic team training/match took place during an inter-county match or non-match week.<sup>79</sup>

For players who trained/played with another Gaelic team during the 2016 championship, such training added 4 hours per week to their Gaelic sport time commitments. This is only a minimum value, however, as it does not include the time required to travel to and from such training/match sessions.

### **5.3 CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY**

#### **5.3.1 Overview**

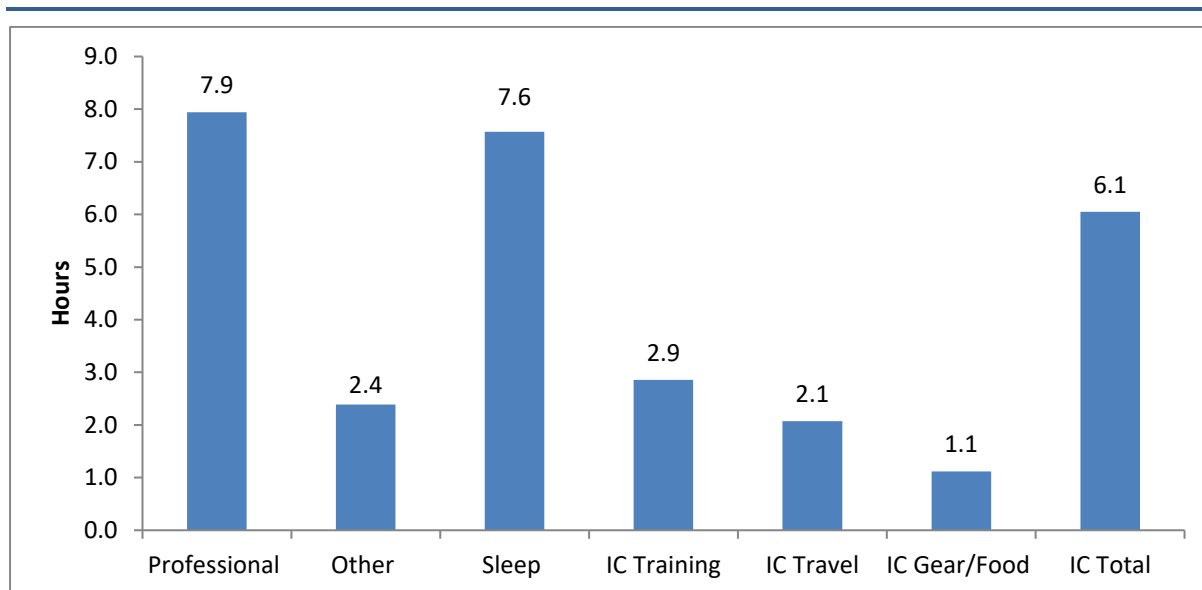
In this section we provide some insight into the impact of players' inter-county time commitments on the other areas of their lives: specifically, the quantity of time that they got to spend on their professional commitments, on sleep and with their family/partner/friends/relaxing/other activities on a pitch-based training day. For space reasons, the family/partner/friends/relaxing/other activities category is referred to as 'Other' in the charts that follow.

We already know from Section 5.2 that players spent an average of 6.1 hours on their inter-county commitments on a field-based training day. For the remainder of that day, they devoted 7.9 hours to their professional commitments, 7.6 hours to sleep and 2.4 hours to family/partner/friends/relaxing/other activities (Figure 5.1).

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<sup>78</sup> Eleven per cent of the group of players that undertook their inter-county field-based and sports conditioning trainings also partook in individually led trainings during weeks when they had no county match.

<sup>79</sup> For a more comprehensive examination of the number and duration of other Gaelic team trainings/matches that 2016 players undertook, see Appendix C (Section C.12).

**FIGURE 5.1 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' 24-HOUR TIME ALLOCATION ON A CHAMPIONSHIP FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: IC = Inter-County.

The only daily time-use data available for the general population in Ireland relate to 2005 (McGinnity et al., 2005). At that time, men were found to allocate (on average) on a week day 7.51 hours/minutes to their professional commitments,<sup>80</sup> 8.04 to sleeping, 1.40 to eating/cooking, 0.23 to outdoor sport and 8.23 to other activities. As well as personal care and domestic chores,<sup>81</sup> the 'other activities' category included time spent with children (0.31) and family/friends (1.38),<sup>82</sup> and on rest (1.02) and downtime/relaxing (3.16).<sup>83</sup>

Although the time periods that the national time use and the inter-county player data relate to are not ideal for comparative purposes (2005 and 2016 respectively), some of the discrepancies between the two groups are still noteworthy: in

<sup>80</sup> This captures work, study, work/study breaks and travel to and from work. The travel category used in the McGinnity et al. (2005) time-use questionnaire also captured time spent on leisure and domestic travel. These two types of travel could not be identified separately from work travel; thus, they are included in this professional commitment measurement.

<sup>81</sup> The weekday time-use diary for men summed to 26.26 hours: this occurred because, in the time-use survey, respondents were allowed to record multiple activities (to allow for the fact that individuals often carry out more than one activity at a time). Excluding unspecified time (0.19), the remaining time (after accounting for professional career; sleep; eating and cooking; time with family, friends and children; general downtime/relaxation and rest) was spent on activities such as personal care, shopping, and DIY (for further information, see McGinnity et al., 2005).

<sup>82</sup> Includes chatting with family and friends, phoning/texting, pubs and restaurants, and concerts etc.

<sup>83</sup> Includes hobbies (excluding outdoor sport), TV, voluntary work, religious activity, computer (personal), reading and radio. The weekday time-use diary for men summed to 26.26 hours. Excluding the unspecified time (0.19), the remaining time (after accounting for professional career, sleep, etc.) was spent on activities such as personal care, shopping and DIY (for further information, see McGinnity et al., 2005).

particular, time spent on ‘other activities’ and sport.

Inter-county players spent an average of 2.4 hours on ‘other’ activities in 2016 compared to an average of 8.23 hours (minutes) by the general male population in 2005. On the basis that the time commitments of senior inter-county players were not as great in 2005 as they are today, the gap between the two groups will not have been as large in 2005 as is suggested here. Also, if the general male population are working more hours today, and/or are devoting more time to sport and/or sleep, compared to the situation in 2005 the gap will not be as large today either. Nevertheless, a disparity is still likely to exist between inter-county players and the general male population regarding the amount of time that they are getting to devote to other activities, particularly time with their family, partner, friends and general relaxation/downtime.

Regarding the time allocated to ‘sport’, again, the difference between the general male population and inter-county players may not be large as the comparison here suggests. Nevertheless, we know that it is individual-type sports that more people in Ireland are engaging in over time (Sport Ireland, 2018), and that people who participate in individual sports allocate less time to their sessions compared to those that engage in team sports (Lunn et al., 2007). Thus, it is likely that a sizeable difference does exist between the general male population and inter-county players in the time allocated to sport.

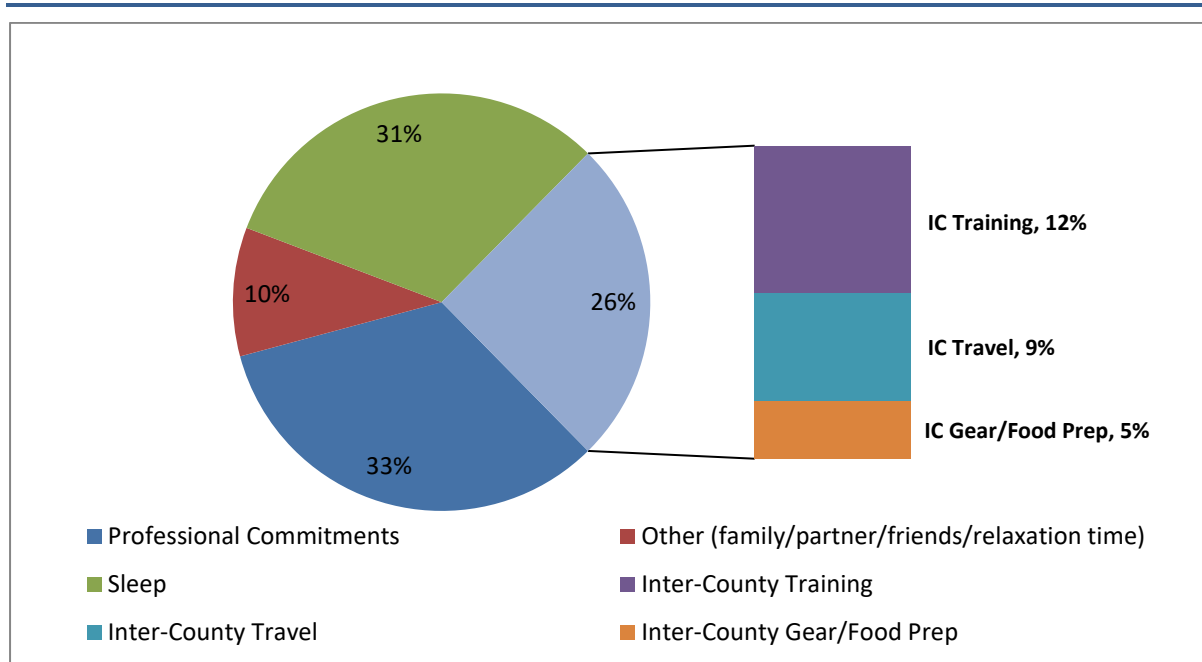
More recent data exist for the general population on time allocated to work that inter-county players can be compared with. Specifically, in 2016 men in Ireland worked an average 39.7 hours per week (CSO, 2017). Based on the standard working week of 5 days, this equates to 7.9 hours per day. Thus, the average amount of time that inter-county players devote to their professional commitments on a pitch-based training day (7.9 hours)<sup>84</sup> is in line with the general male population.

Returning to inter-county players and their time allocations on a pitch-based training day, percentage-wise they were spending 33 per cent of their time on professional commitments, 31 per cent on sleep, 26 per cent on inter-county training commitments and 10 per cent with/on their family/partner/friends/general downtime/other activities (Figure 5.2).

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<sup>84</sup> 8.3 hours for inter-county players whose primary economic status in June 2016 was employee or self-employed.

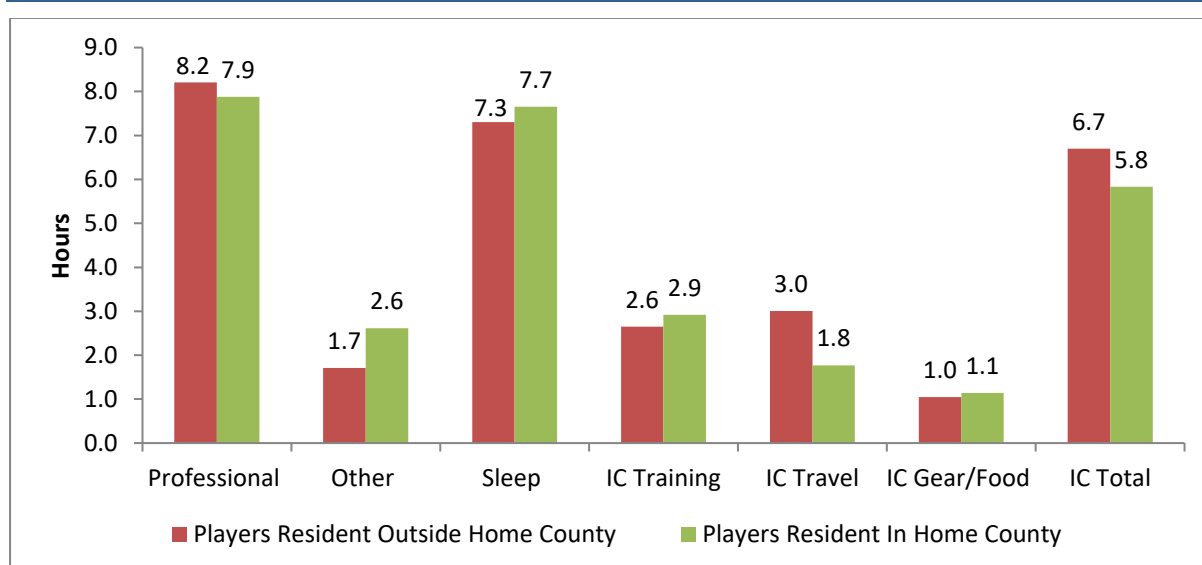
**FIGURE 5.2 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' 24-HOUR TIME ALLOCATION DURING A CHAMPIONSHIP FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY: PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Players resident outside of their home county did not offset their higher inter-county training travel time by devoting any less time to their professional commitments. Instead, they spent less time with their family/partner/friends/relaxing – 1.7 hours compared to 2.6 hours for players based in their home county (Figure 5.3).

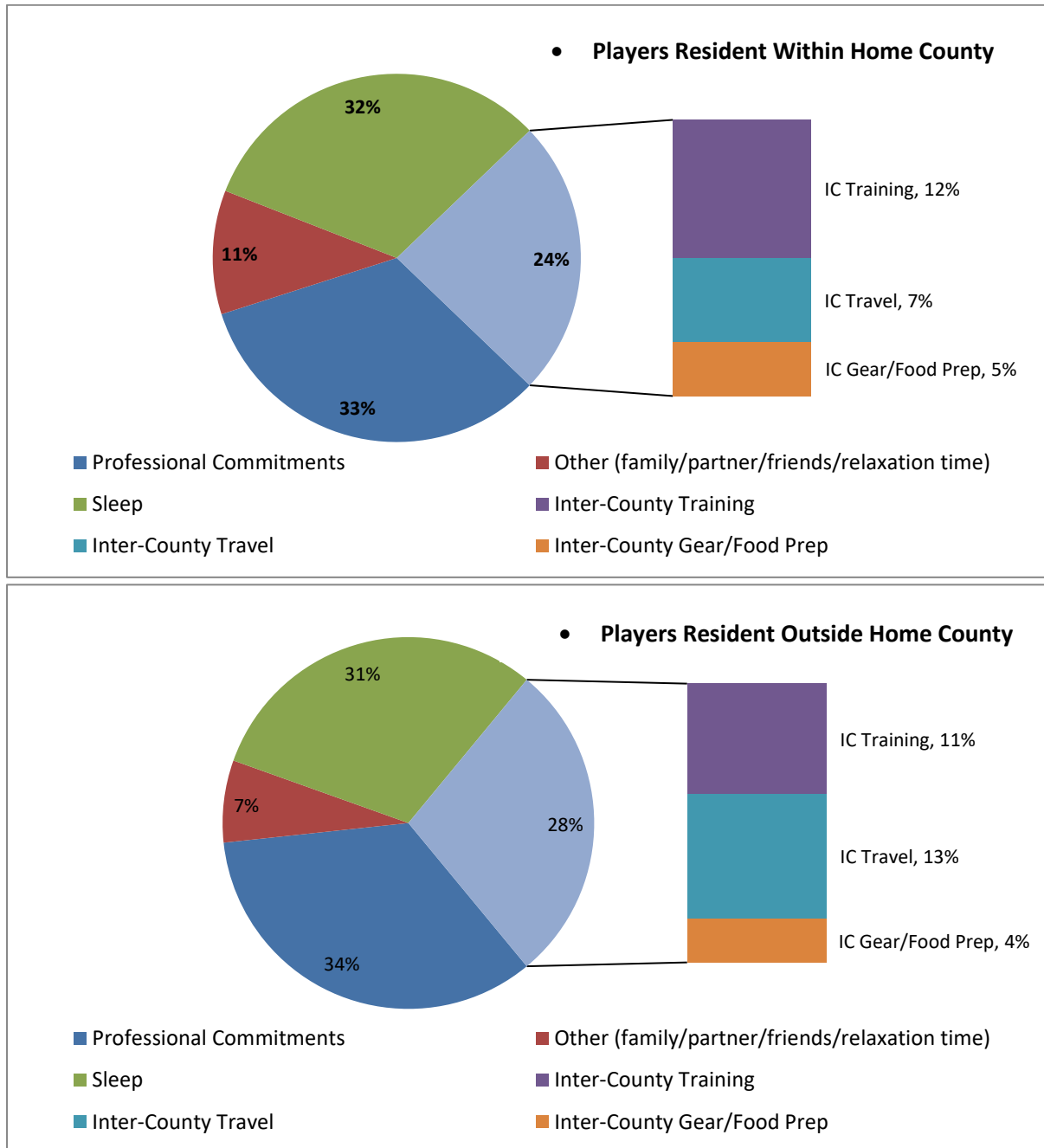
**FIGURE 5.3 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' 24-HOUR TIME ALLOCATION ON A CHAMPIONSHIP FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY: PLAYERS' RESIDENCY**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

This means that these players only got to spend 7 per cent of a field-based training day with their family/partner/friends/generally relaxing, which compares to 11 per cent for those resident in their home county (Figure 5.4).<sup>85</sup>

**FIGURE 5.4 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' 24-HOUR TIME ALLOCATION DURING A CHAMPIONSHIP FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY: PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN BASED ON PLAYERS' RESIDENCE**



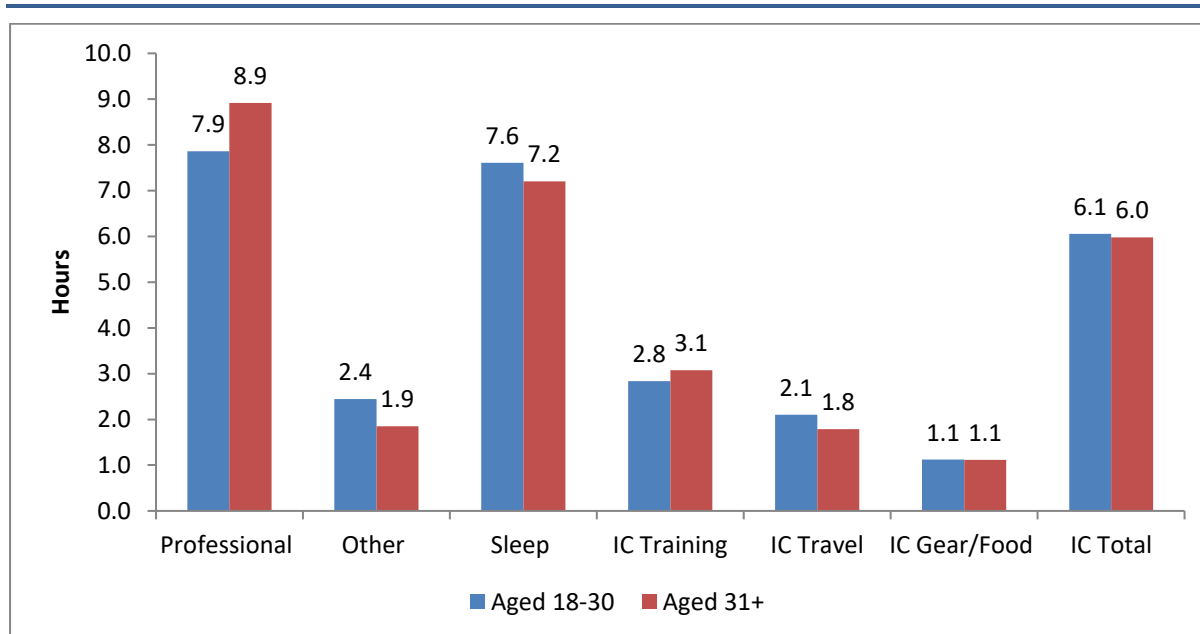
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Players aged over 30 were found to be devoting more time than average to their

<sup>85</sup> See Appendix C (Section C.13) for this field-based training day breakdown by code, playing level and age.

professional commitments on a field-based training day, but no less time to their inter-county training commitments (Figure 5.5).<sup>86</sup> Instead, this group of players succeeded in doing this by devoting less time to sleep and to their family/partner/friends/general downtime on such a training day.

**FIGURE 5.5 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' 24-HOUR TIME ALLOCATION DURING A CHAMPIONSHIP FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY: AGE GROUP**

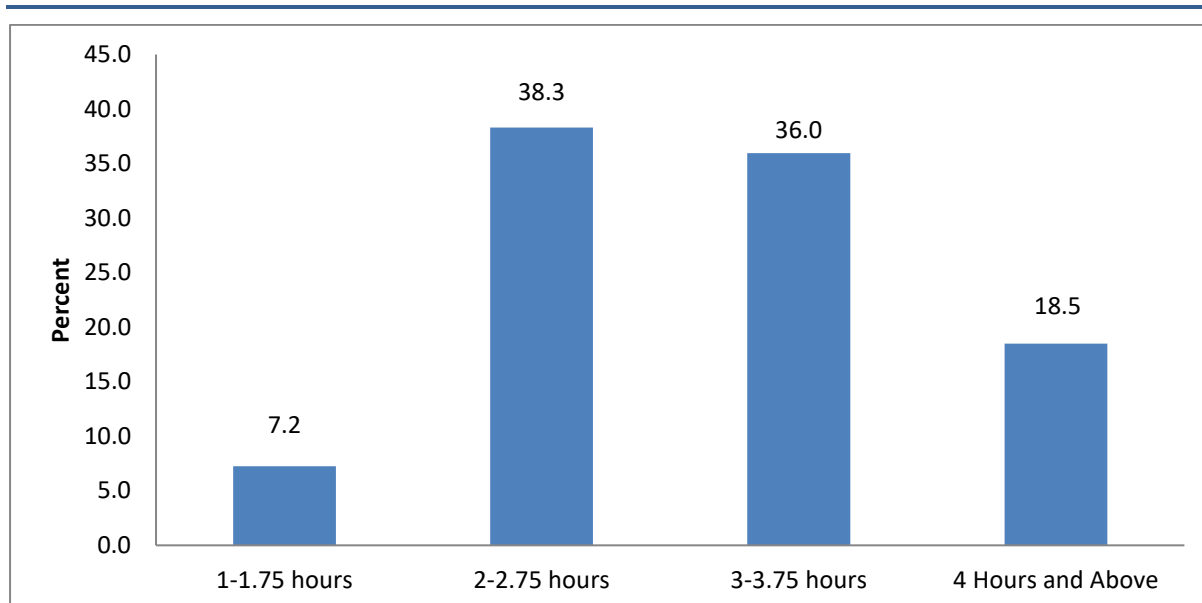


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

### 5.3.2 Duration of inter-county field-based training sessions

The average duration of an inter-county field-based training session during the 2016 championship was 2.9 hours (Table 5.1, Figure 5.1). When we take a closer look at this (Figure 5.6) we find that 36 per cent of players spent between 3 and 3.75 hours at such a training session. However, almost a fifth (18.5 per cent) spent 4 hours and above. As mentioned in Section 5.2.1, it is important to remember that this training duration information includes time spent on prehabilitation, rehabilitation, active recovery, team meetings, psychology talks, video analysis, training meals, etc., as well as the actual pitch session.

<sup>86</sup> See Appendix Table C.13.3 for detailed 24-hour information for each age group.

**FIGURE 5.6 NUMBER OF HOURS DEVOTED TO AN INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED TRAINING SESSION: 2016 PLAYERS**


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

We can see from Tables 5.7 and 5.8 that players playing in the top tiers were the most likely to allocate 4 hours and above to their inter-county field-based training sessions, particularly Division 1 footballers (33 per cent).<sup>87</sup>

**TABLE 5.7 NUMBER OF HOURS DEVOTED TO INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED GAELIC FOOTBALL TRAINING SESSION: 2016 PLAYERS BY PLAYING LEVEL (PER CENT)**

During 2016 Championship Season (late May/June)	Football	Division 1	Division 2	Division 3	Division 4
1–1.75 hours	5.3	*	*	[<9.0]	*
2–2.75 hours	36.5	24.9	33.4	33.1	59.2
3–3.75 hours	37.3	38.8	41.6	39.6	27.5
4 hours and above	20.9	33.2	21.8	20.0	*

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

<sup>87</sup> For age breakdown, see Appendix Figure C.14.1.



**TABLE 5.8 NUMBER OF HOURS DEVOTED TO AN INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED HURLING TRAINING SESSION: 2016 PLAYERS BY PLAYING LEVEL (PER CENT)**

During 2016 Championship Season (late May/June)	Hurling	MacCarthy Cup	Christy Ring	Nicky Rackard	Lory Meagher
1–1.75 hours	9.3	*	[<13.0]	[<16.0]	[<21.0]
2–2.75 hours	40.3	34.3	45.8	43.5	54.5
3–3.75 hours	34.5	39.8	30.2	32.5	*
4 hours and above	15.9	22.8	[<12.0]	*	*

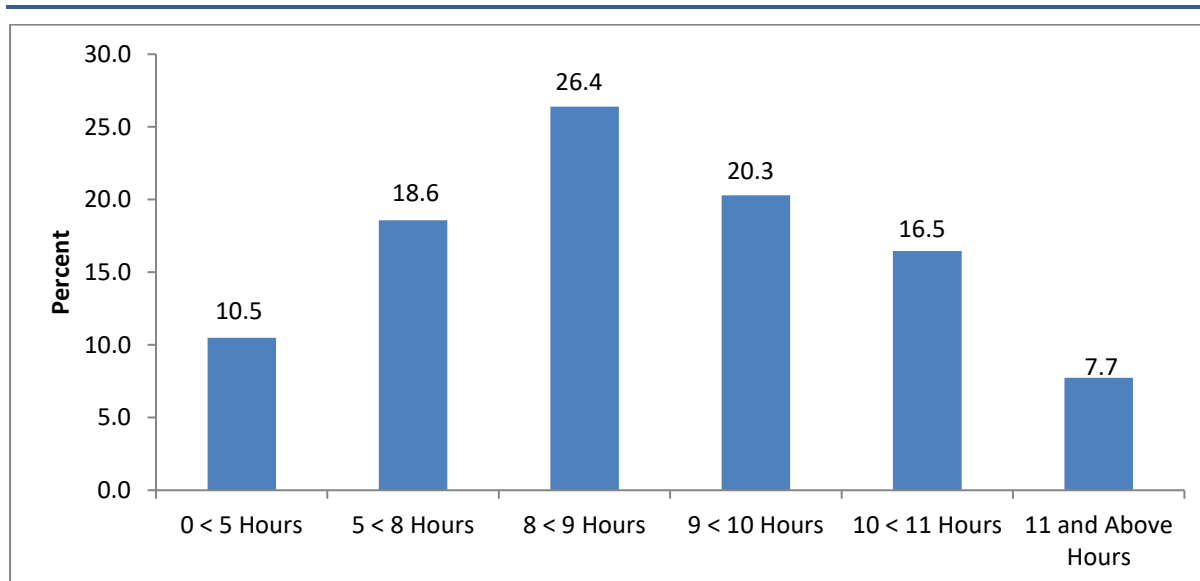
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

### 5.3.3 Time allocated to professional commitments

Almost 50 per cent of 2016 players allocated between 8 and 10 hours to their professional commitments (work/study) on a field-based training day during the championship (Figure 5.7). Another 24 per cent spent over 10 hours, which is a sizeable proportion of players.

**FIGURE 5.7 NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENTS ON A FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY: 2016 PLAYERS**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

When we examined this by playing level (Tables 5.9 and 5.10), we found that around a third of Division 2 footballers (37 per cent) and Nicky Rackard (34 per cent) and Lory Meagher (32 per cent) hurlers were devoting 10 hours and above to their professional commitments on a field-based training day.

Forty per cent of Division 1 footballers spent less than 8 hours on their professional commitments on such a training day. This finding fits with that presented in Section 5.3.2, where we found that a larger proportion of this group of players allocated 4

hours or above to their field-based training sessions.

**TABLE 5.9 NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENTS BY 2016 GAELIC FOOTBALLERS ON A FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY: OVERALL AND LEVEL (PER CENT)**

During 2016 Championship Season (late May/June)	Football	Division 1	Division 2	Division 3	Division 4
0–8 hours	27.3	40.0	16.2	29.2	23.0
8–10 hours	47.3	44.0	46.9	47.9	51.7
10 and above hours	25.4	16.0	37.0	22.9	25.3

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**TABLE 5.10 NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENTS BY 2016 HURLERS ON A FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY: OVERALL AND LEVEL (PER CENT)**

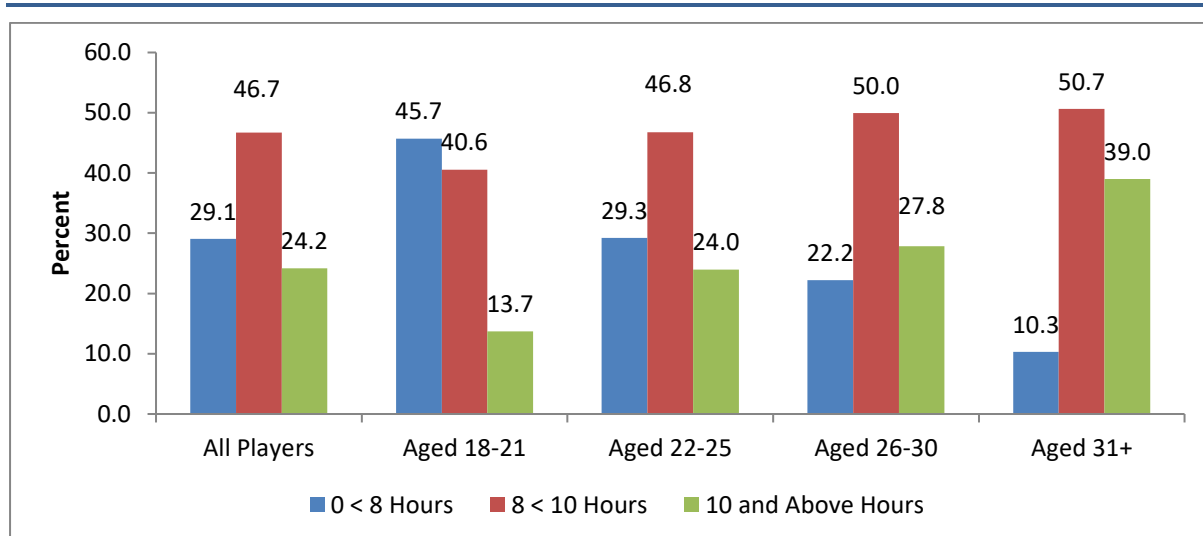
During 2016 Championship Season (late May/June)	Hurling	MacCarthy Cup	Christy Ring	Nicky Rackard	Lory Meagher
0–8 hours	31.0	36.2	32.7	[<20.0]	[<23.0]
8–10 hours	46.0	48.2	41.3	45.8	45.3
10 and above hours	23.0	15.6	26.0	34.4	32.1

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

Time allocated to professional commitments seems to increase with age (Figure 5.8). However, one needs to bear in mind that this time information relates to late May/June 2016: thus, younger players, who would predominantly be students, might be found to be allocating more time to their professional commitments if this information was captured during a period when these players were studying (e.g. January to April). Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that 39 per cent of players aged over 30 were allocating 10 hours or above to their professional commitments on the same day that they had an inter-county field-based training session.

**FIGURE 5.8 BREAKDOWN OF THE NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENTS ON AN INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY: OVERALL AND AGE**

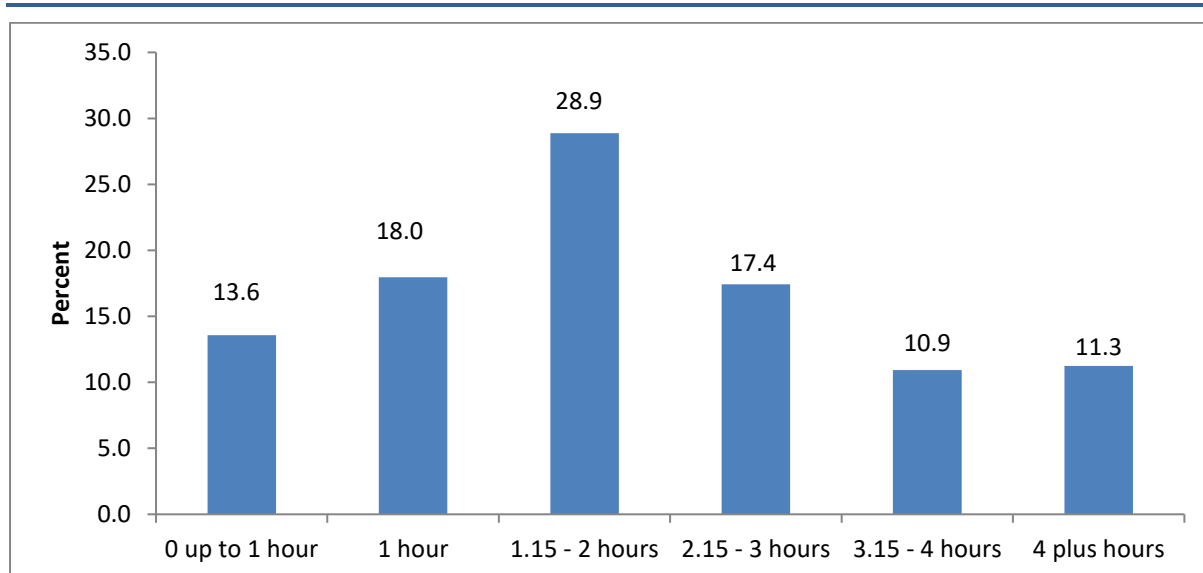


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

### 5.3.4 Time allocated to family, partner, friends, relaxing, other activities

We found that the majority of players (61 per cent) were spending two hours or less with their family, partner, friends, relaxing, on other activities on an inter-county field-based training day (Figure 5.9).<sup>88</sup>

**FIGURE 5.9 NUMBERS OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO FAMILY, PARTNER, FRIENDS, RELAXING ON A FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY: 2016 PLAYERS**

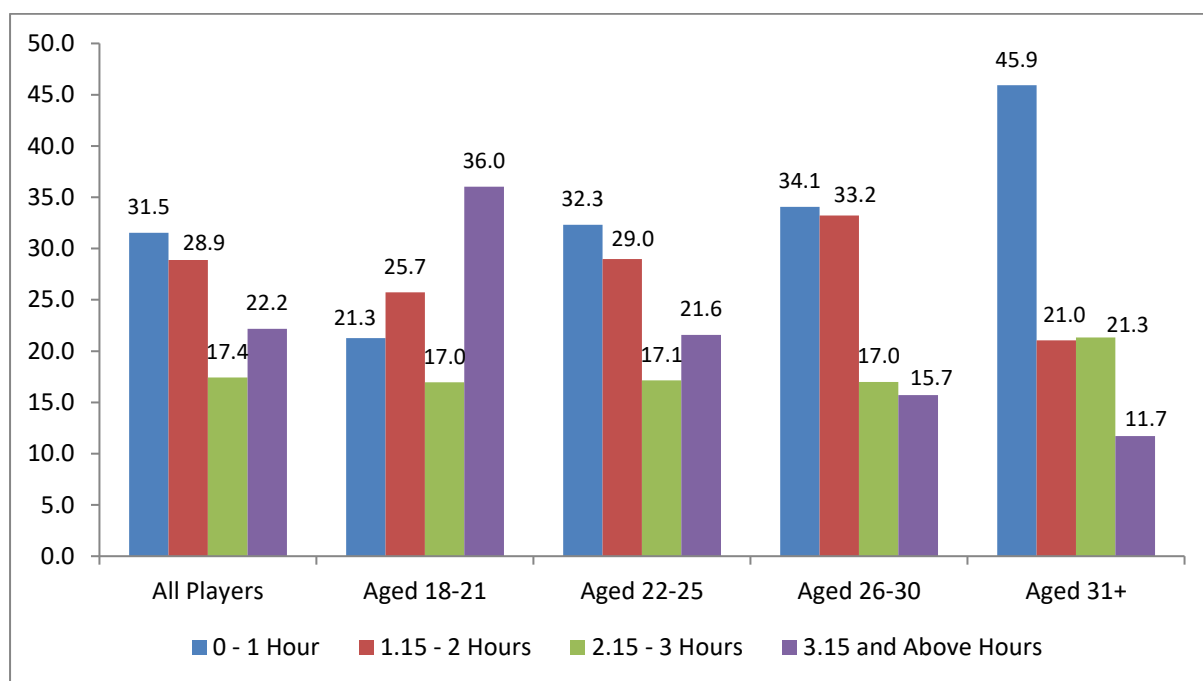


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

<sup>88</sup> For a breakdown by code, see Appendix Figure C.15.1.

This was a bigger issue among those aged over 30, with 46 per cent spending an hour or less with their family, partner, friends, or relaxing on such a training day (Figure 5.10). As mentioned previously, devoting less time to these elements of their lives was one of the ways in which this group of players managed to devote more time to their professional commitments on a field-based training day and, at the same time, no less time than other players to their inter-county commitments.

**FIGURE 5.10 NUMBERS OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO FAMILY, PARTNER, FRIENDS, RELAXING ON A FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND AGE GROUP (PER CENT)**



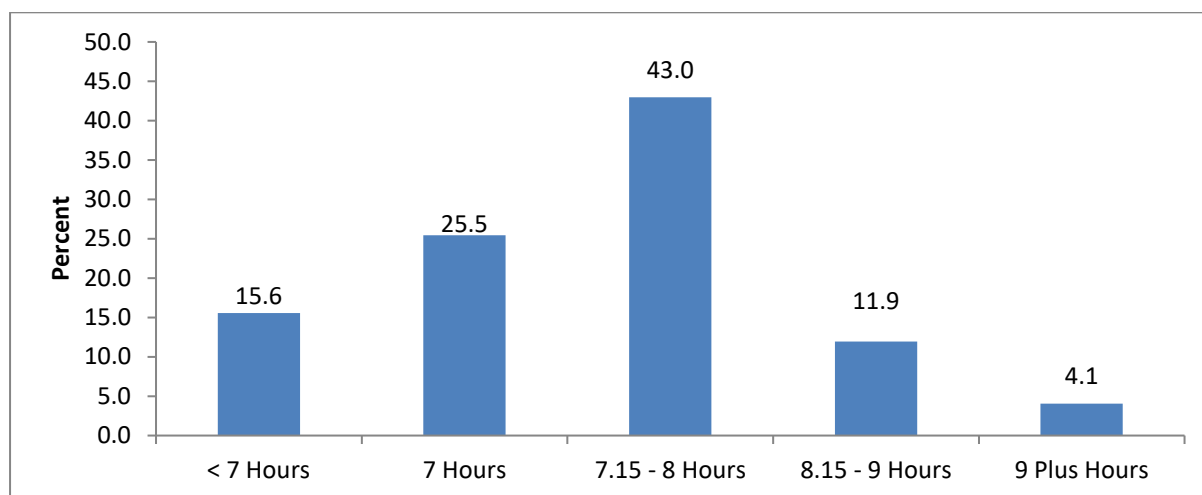
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

### 5.3.5 Time allocated to sleep

Forty-three per cent of players got between 7 and 8 hours’ sleep (i.e. 7.15–8 hours) on nights that they had inter-county field-based training sessions (Figure 5.11). Another 41 per cent got only 7 hours sleep or less, which means that just 16 per cent of players got over 8 hours’ sleep on a field-based training night.<sup>89</sup> Overall, 48 per cent of players did not get the 8 to 10 hours sleep that is recommended for athletes (Samuels and Alexander, 2013). This was particularly the case for players resident outside of their home counties (63.4 per cent).

<sup>89</sup> For a breakdown by code and playing level, see Appendix Figures C.16.1 and C.16.2.

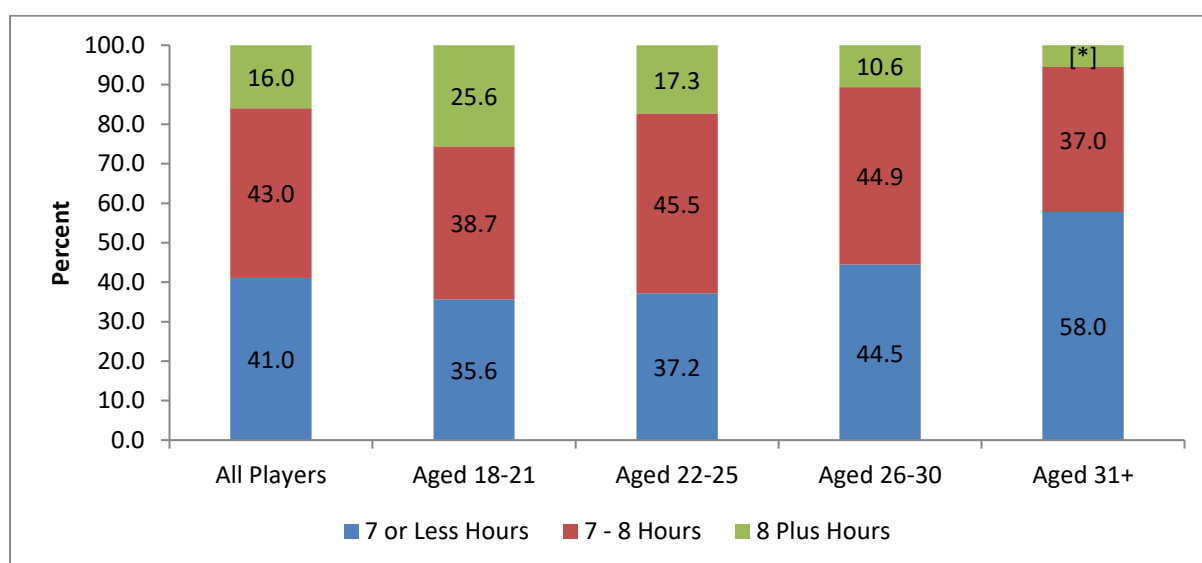
**FIGURE 5.11 NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO SLEEP ON A FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY: 2016 PLAYERS**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

An examination of sleeping levels by age revealed that the majority of players aged over 30 were getting seven or fewer hours sleep on a field-based training day: 58 per cent (Figure 5.12).

**FIGURE 5.12 NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO SLEEP ON A FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND AGE GROUP**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

#### 5.4 THE NUMBER OF GAELIC TEAMS PLAYERS WERE INVOLVED WITH DURING 2016

Players were asked about the number of teams that they played with during 2016. In terms of player welfare this is a key issue to examine as, in addition to the

training/matches required for each team, players will have more than one team set-up and management to adhere to.

Forty per cent of players (Table 5.11) indicated that they played with two teams during the 2016 season, which were, most likely, their county and club teams. Another 33 per cent were involved with three teams, 14 per cent with four teams, and 13 per cent of players indicated that they were involved with five or more Gaelic teams during 2016.<sup>90</sup>

A revealing picture emerges when we examine this issue by age group (Table 5.12). In particular, we can see that it is mainly players aged 18 to 21 that are involved with multiple teams. Specifically, 68 per cent of this age group played with four or more teams during 2016; 42 per cent played with five or more teams.

**TABLE 5.11 NUMBER OF TEAMS PLAYED WITH DURING THE 2016 SEASON: 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS (PER CENT)**

No. of Teams	All Players	Aged 18–21	Aged 22–25	Aged 26–30	Aged 31+
2	40.0	10.1	36.0	60.0	66.0
3	33.1	22.3	45.0	30.0	25.0
4	13.8	25.8	14.0	7.0	*
5	7.7	24.9	[<3.0]	*	*
6+	5.4	16.9	[<4.0]	*	*
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100

*Source:* Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

*Note:* The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

## 5.5 TIME COMMITMENTS ACROSS THE 2016 PLAYING SEASONS

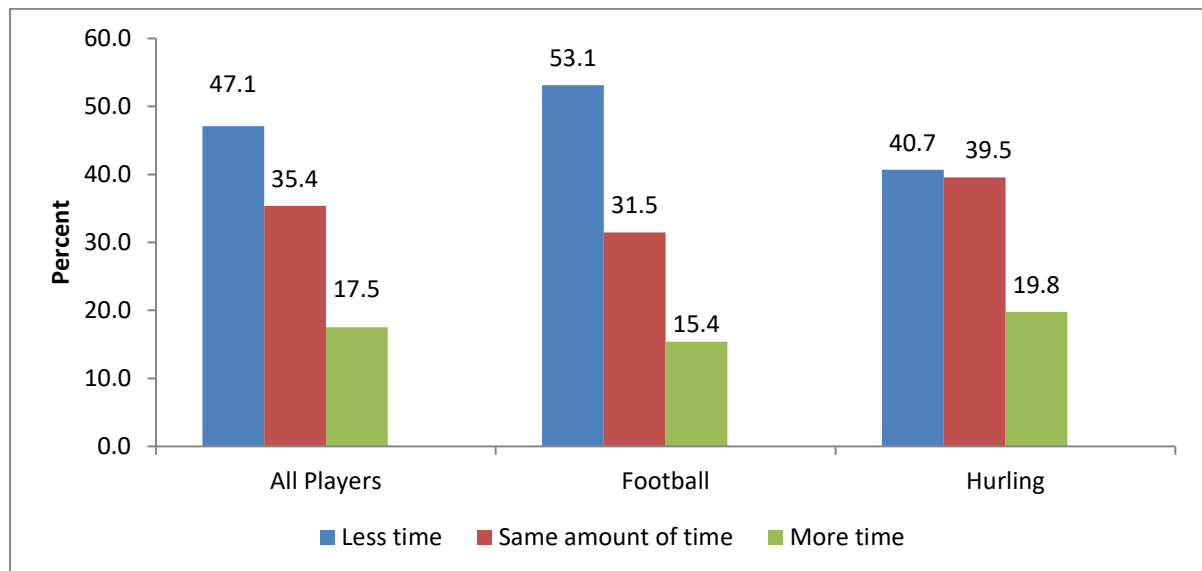
Players were asked about how their senior inter-county commitments (training, matches, prehabilitation, team meetings, video analysis, etc.) during the 2016 championship compared with both the pre-season (November 2015 – January 2016) and the national league (February – April 2016).

Focusing on the pre-season (Figure 5.13), 47 per cent of players indicated that they spent less time on their inter-county commitments during this playing period compared to the championship. A further 35 per cent felt that they spent the same

<sup>90</sup> Other teams that 2016 inter-county players were involved with would include club (senior, intermediate, junior football and/or hurling), county U21 (football and/or hurling), club U21 (football and/or hurling), college (football and/or hurling), Defence Force teams, divisional teams, etc.

amount of time on their senior inter-county commitments during both of these seasons, while 18 per cent indicated that they spent more time on their senior inter-county commitments during the pre-season than they did during the championship.

**FIGURE 5.13 TIME SPENT BY 2016 PLAYERS ON INTER-COUNTY COMMITMENTS DURING THE PRE-SEASON COMPARED TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP: OVERALL AND CODE**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

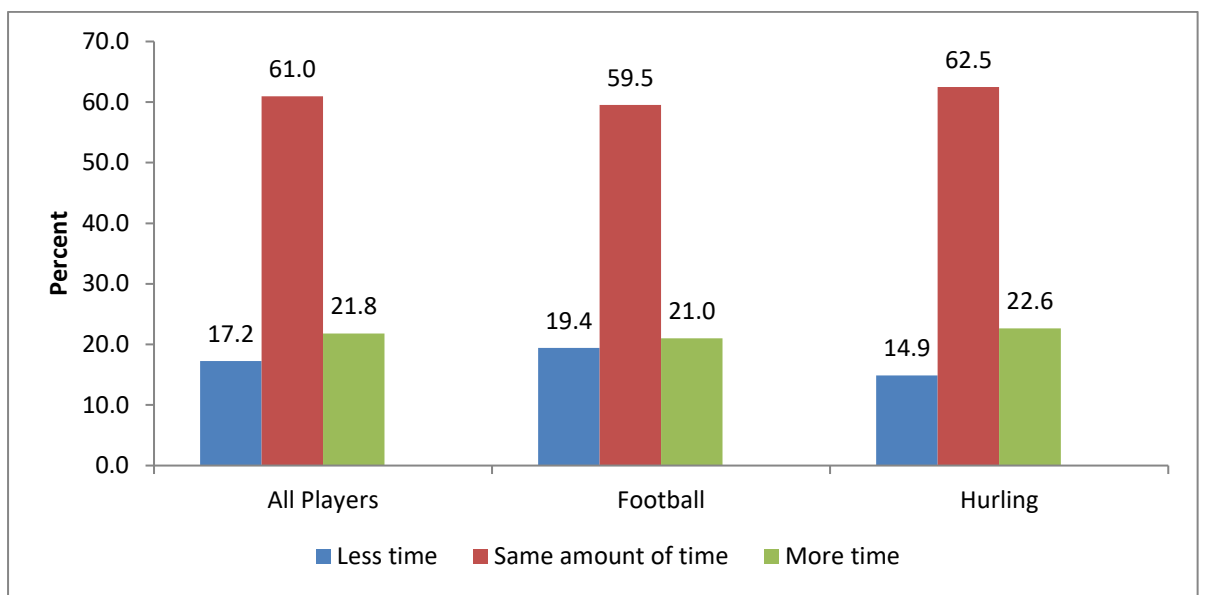
This response varied by code (Figure 5.13). Specifically, a higher percentage of footballers indicated that they spent less time on their inter-county commitments during the pre-season compared to the championship: 53 per cent compared to 41 per cent of hurlers.<sup>91</sup>

When we asked players about how their senior inter-county time commitments during the national league compared with the championship, 61 per cent said that the time commitments were the same, 17 per cent said less and 22 per cent said more (Figure 5.14).<sup>92</sup>

<sup>91</sup> See Appendix Figures C.17.1 and C.17.2 for a breakdown by playing level.

<sup>92</sup> See Appendix Figures C.17.3 and C.17.4 for a breakdown by playing level.

**FIGURE 5.14 TIME SPENT BY 2016 PLAYERS ON INTER-COUNTY COMMITMENTS DURING THE NATIONAL LEAGUE COMPARED TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP: OVERALL AND CODE**



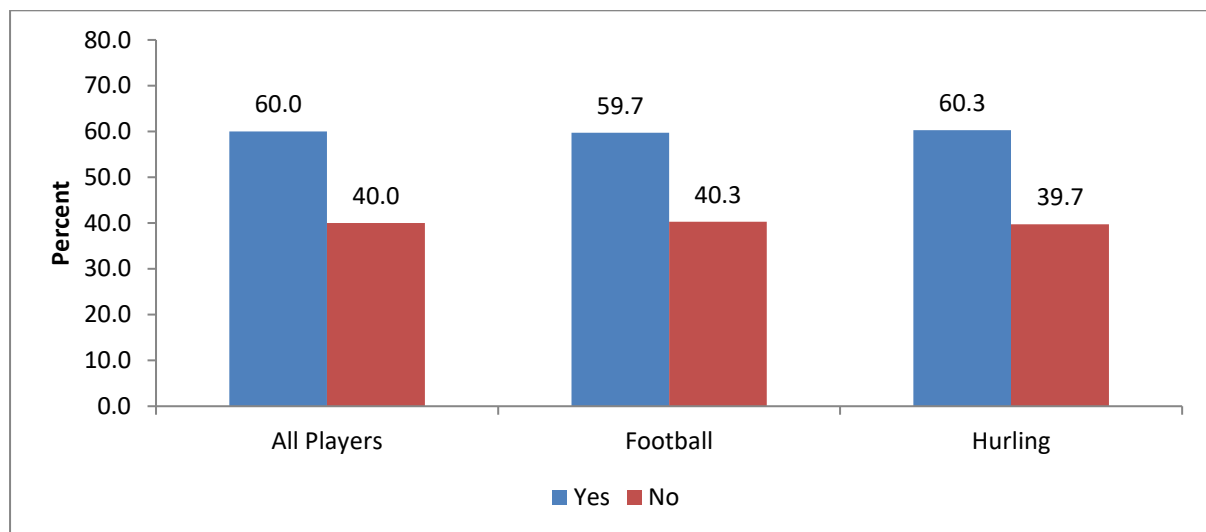
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

### 5.6 TIME OFF FROM GAELIC GAMES DURING 2016

Players were asked if they had any time off from their Gaelic games between January and December 2016. This included not just their inter-county team involvement but also training and games with their club, college and any other Gaelic team that they were with during 2016 (Garda team, divisional team, etc.). We can see from Figure 5.15 that 40 per cent of players indicated that, as a player, they had no time off from Gaelic games during the course of 2016. There was no difference between footballers and hurlers in this regard.<sup>93</sup>

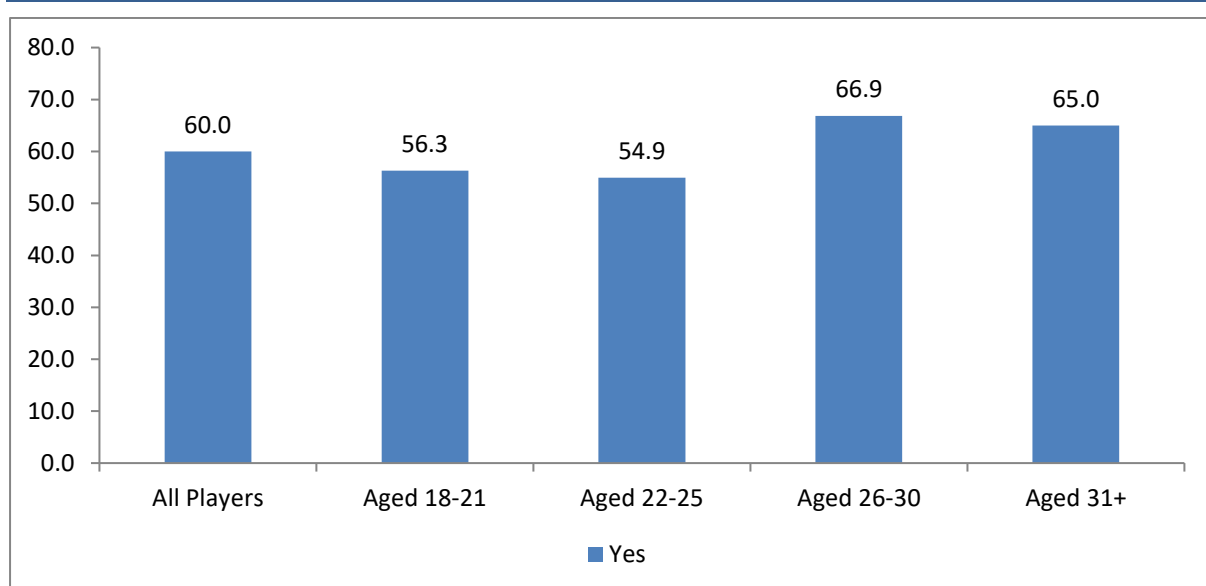
<sup>93</sup> See Appendix Figures C.18.1 and C.18.2 for this examination by playing level.



**FIGURE 5.15 TIME OFF FROM GAELIC GAMES BETWEEN JANUARY AND DECEMBER 2016: OVERALL AND CODE**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

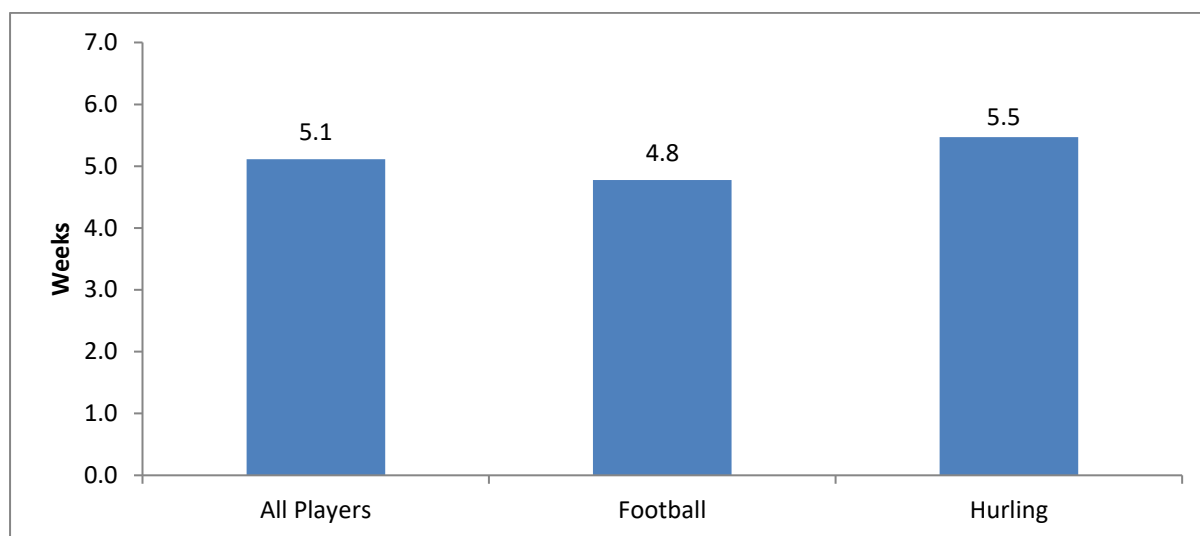
When we examined this issue by age (Figure 5.16), we found that greater percentages of players aged over 25 had time off from Gaelic games during 2016: 65–67 per cent of those aged 26 and above compared to 55–56 per cent of those aged 18 to 25. Given the results presented in Section 5.4 above on the number of Gaelic teams that players were involved with during 2016, it is not surprising to find that younger players had less time off given that greater percentages of these players were involved with three or more teams during 2016.

**FIGURE 5.16 TIME OFF FROM GAELIC GAMES BETWEEN JANUARY AND DECEMBER 2016: OVERALL AND AGE GROUP (PER CENT)**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Of the 60 per cent of players who had time off from Gaelic games in 2016, the average number of weeks that they had off was 5 (Figure 5.17).

**FIGURE 5.17 AVERAGE AMOUNT OF TIME OFF FROM GAELIC GAMES BETWEEN JANUARY AND DECEMBER 2016: OVERALL AND CODE (NUMBER OF WEEKS)**

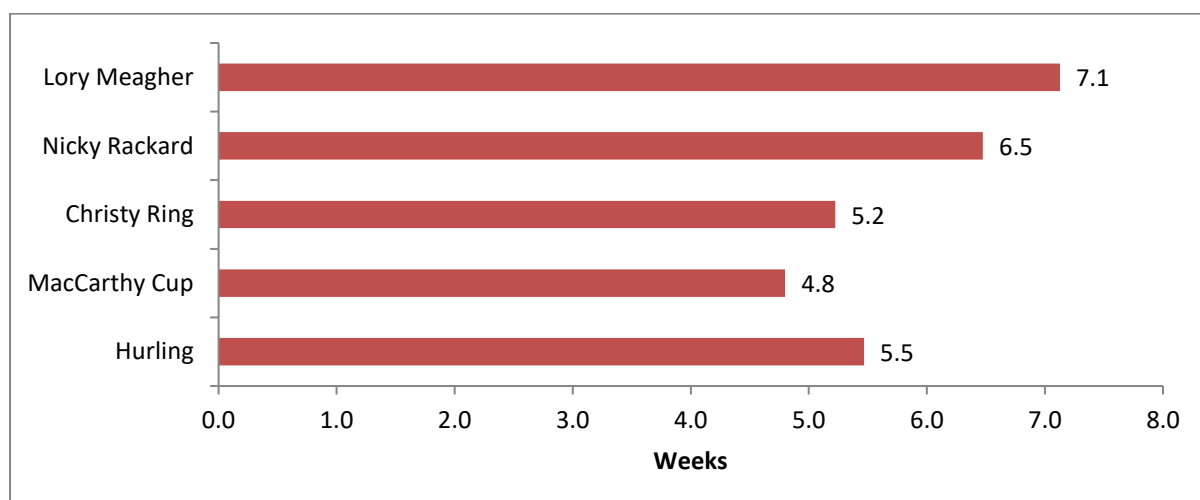


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: Calculation based on the 60 per cent of players who had time off from Gaelic games in 2016.

Among hurlers who had time off during 2016 (Figure 5.18), Lory Meagher and Nicky Rackard players were off for longer: 7.1 and 6.5 weeks compared to 4.8 and 5.2 weeks for MacCarthy Cup and Christy Ring hurlers respectively.

**FIGURE 5.18 AVERAGE AMOUNT OF TIME OFF FROM GAELIC GAMES BETWEEN JANUARY AND DECEMBER 2016: HURLERS (NUMBER OF WEEKS)**

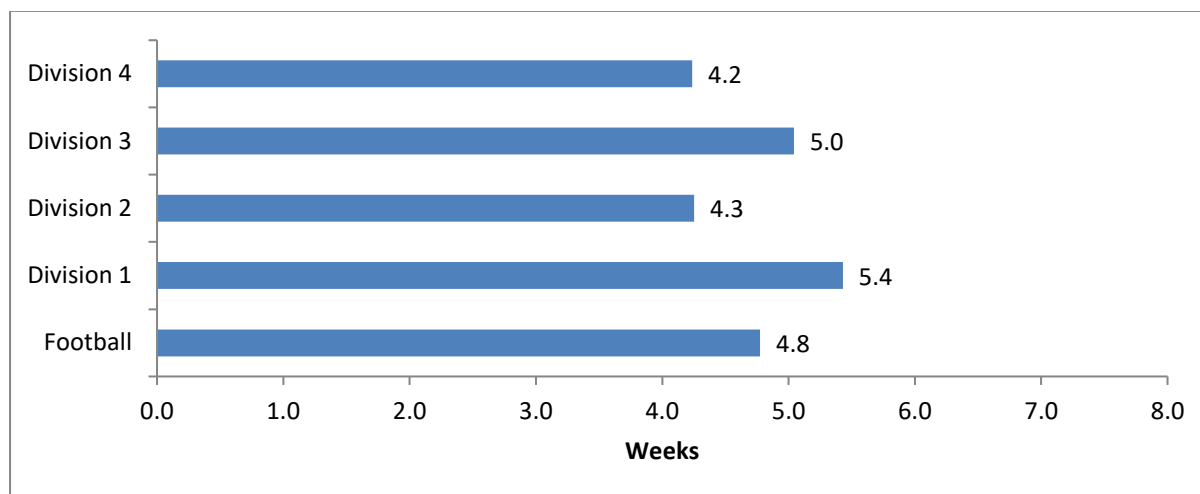


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: Calculation based on the 60 per cent of players who had time off from Gaelic games in 2016.

There was less variation among 2016 footballers in this regard (Figure 5.19).

**FIGURE 5.19 AVERAGE AMOUNT OF TIME OFF FROM GAELIC GAMES BETWEEN JANUARY AND DECEMBER 2016: GAELIC FOOTBALLERS (NUMBER OF WEEKS)**

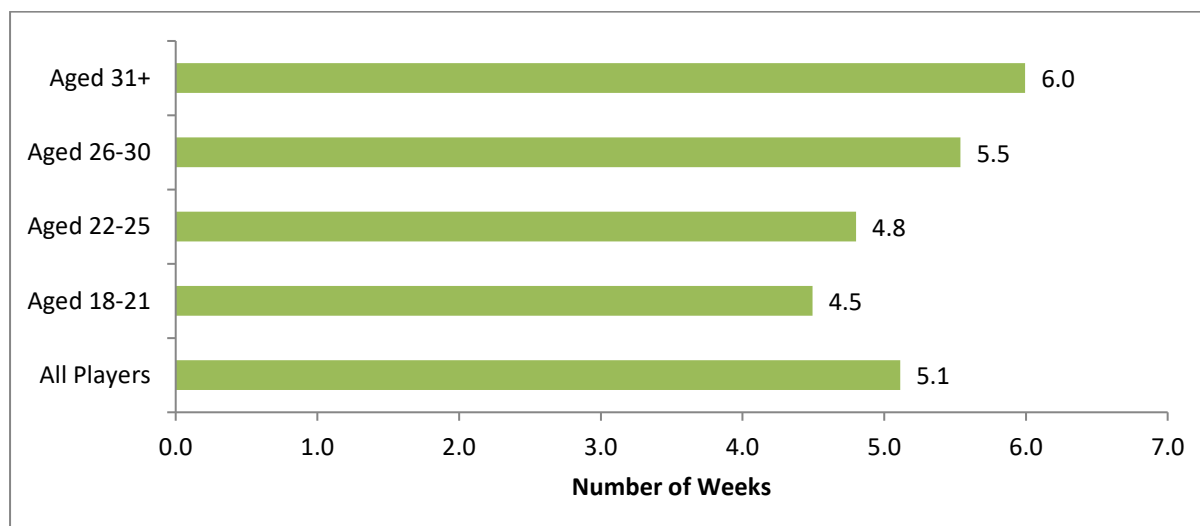


*Source:* Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

*Note:* Calculation based on the 60 per cent of players who had time off from Gaelic Games in 2016.

When we examined this by age we found that the number of weeks that players had off increased with the age of the players (Figure 5.20). Again, this should not be surprising given that greater proportions of younger players were found to be involved with multiple Gaelic teams during 2016 (Section 5.4).

**FIGURE 5.20 AVERAGE AMOUNT OF TIME OFF FROM GAELIC GAMES BETWEEN JANUARY AND DECEMBER 2016: OVERALL AND AGE GROUP (NUMBER OF WEEKS)**



*Source:* Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

*Note:* Calculation based on the 60 per cent of players who had time off from Gaelic games in 2016.

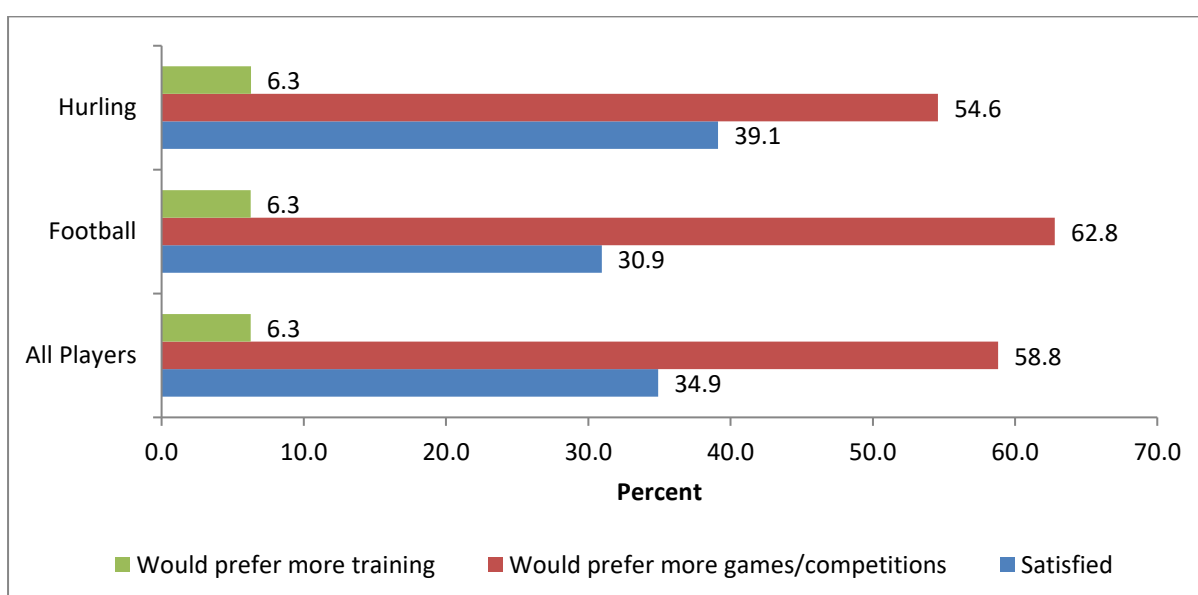
## 5.7 LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH TRAINING TO GAME RATIO DURING THE 2016 GAELIC SEASONS

Given the amount of training that senior inter-county players engage in (Section 5.2), players were asked how satisfied they were with the training to game ratio during the course of the 2016 season.

### 5.7.1 Pre-season

For the pre-season (Figure 5.21), almost 60 per cent of players indicated that they would prefer more games/competitions and less training. Another 35 per cent were satisfied with the ratio of training to games, with the remaining 6 per cent indicating that they would prefer more training and fewer games during this playing period.<sup>94</sup>

**FIGURE 5.21 LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE TRAINING TO GAME RATIO DURING THE 2016 PRE-SEASON: OVERALL AND CODE**



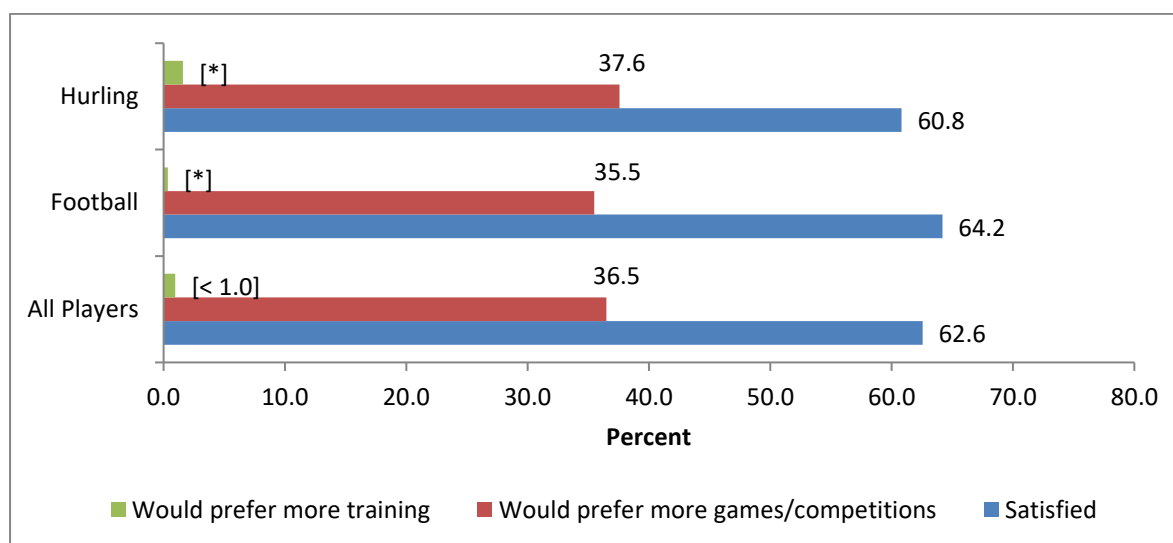
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

### 5.7.2 National league

In relation to the national league (Figure 5.22), while most players were satisfied with the ratio of training to games/competitions during this playing season (63 per cent), over a third of players (37 per cent) indicated that they would prefer more games to training during the national league.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>94</sup> See Appendix Figures C.19.1 to C.19.3 for this examination by playing level and age.

<sup>95</sup> See Appendix Figures C.19.4 to C.19.6 for this examination by playing level and age.

**FIGURE 5.22 LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE TRAINING TO GAME RATIO DURING THE 2016 NATIONAL LEAGUE: OVERALL AND CODE**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

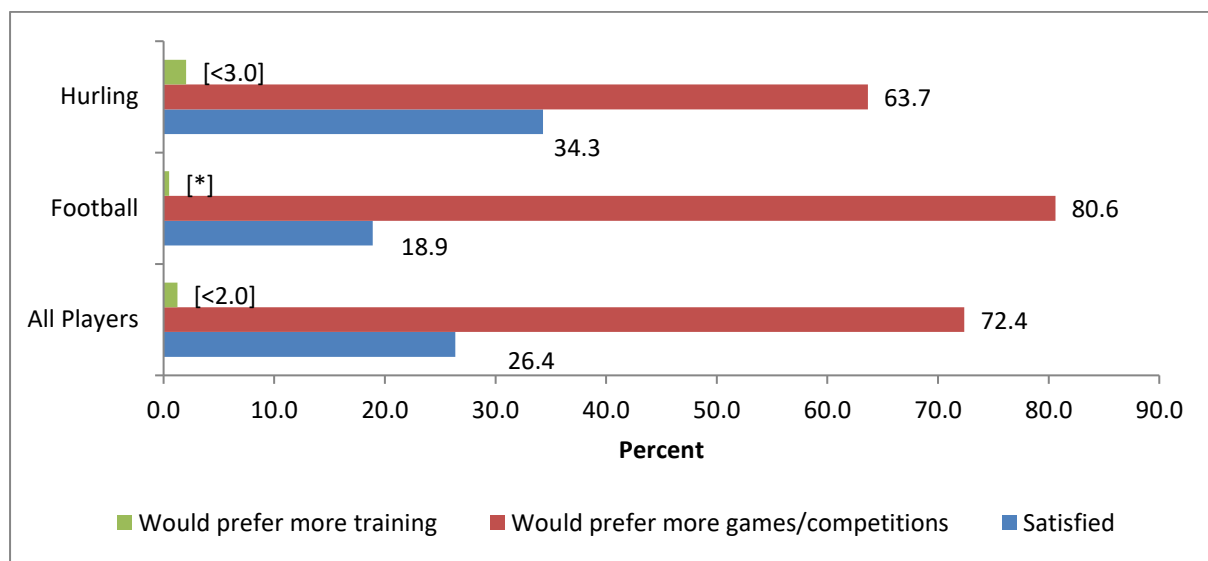
### 5.7.3 Championship

The championship emerged as the playing season where the greatest percentage of players wanted more games and less training (Figure 5.23): 72 per cent, which compares with 59 per cent for the pre-season and 37 per cent for the national league. This was particularly the case among footballers: 81 per cent would have preferred less training and more games compared to 64 per cent of hurlers.<sup>96</sup>

The changes introduced to the hurling and football championship structures in 2018 (i.e., round-robin system in MacCarthy Cup hurling and the Super 8s in football) would likely give rise to a reduction in the percentage of players wanting more games during the championship. This would particularly be the case for hurlers. However, the percentage of footballers may not fall by as much given that it is only eight teams that are effected by the changes that have been made to the football championship structure.

<sup>96</sup> See Appendix Figures C.19.7 to C.19.9 for this examination by playing level and age.

**FIGURE 5.23 LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE TRAINING TO GAME RATIO DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP: OVERALL AND CODE**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

## CHAPTER 6

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### Effects of playing senior inter-county Gaelic games

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we examine some of the effects that playing senior inter-county has on players' lives: in particular, injuries and well-being. We also identify what players would like to spend more time on but cannot because of their inter-county commitments.

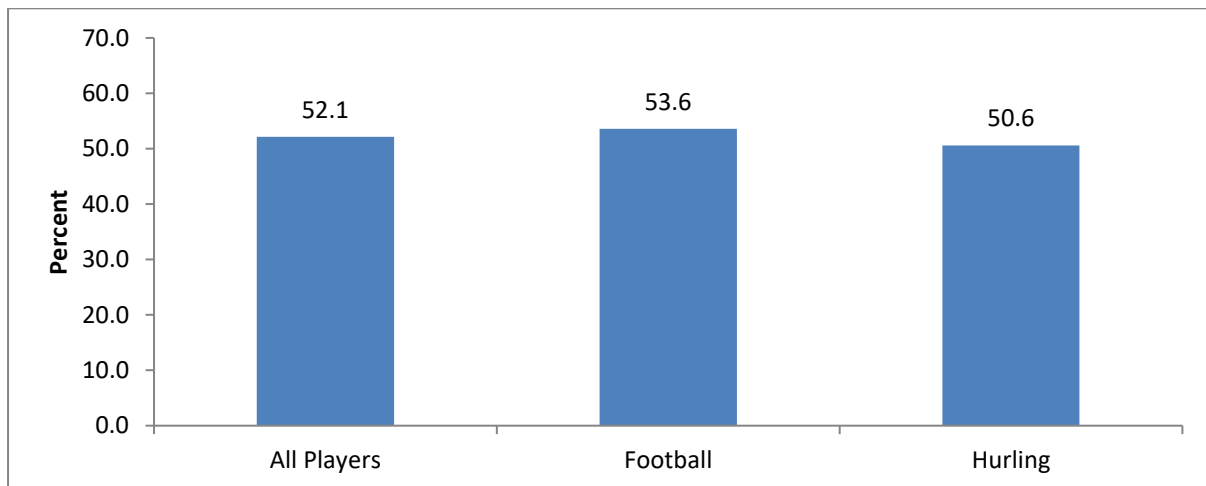
The main downsides to, and benefits of, playing senior inter-county are examined as well, as are players' views on some other aspects of playing at this level (behaviour in public, level of effort demanded, etc.). The chapter concludes by identifying the percentage of players who ceased playing at the end of the 2016 season and their reasons for doing so.

#### 6.2 INCIDENCE AND EFFECTS OF INJURIES

Just over half (52 per cent) of players sustained an injury while either playing or training with their inter-county team during the 2016 season (Figure 6.1): in gathering this information, we asked players to focus specifically on injuries that required surgery, hospitalisation (A&E and/or overnight stay) or time off from training and/or competition.<sup>97</sup> There was no difference between hurlers and footballers in this regard.

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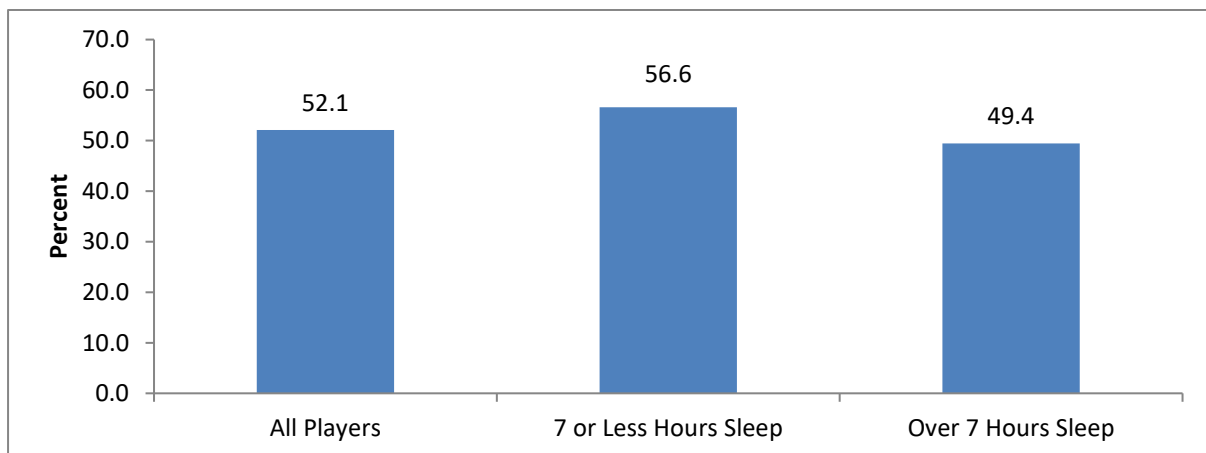
<sup>97</sup> See Appendix Figures D.1.1 to D.1.3 for this examination by playing level and age.

**FIGURE 6.1 INJURY DURING 2016 SEASON: OVERALL AND CODE**

*Source:* Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

*Note:* The information presented here relates specifically to injuries that required surgery, hospitalisation or time off from training and/or competition.

We found that the injury rate was somewhat higher among players who got seven hours' sleep or less on field-based training nights (Figure 6.2): 57 per cent compared to 49 per cent among those who got more than seven hours.

**FIGURE 6.2 INJURY DURING 2016 SEASON: OVERALL AND SLEEP DURATION**

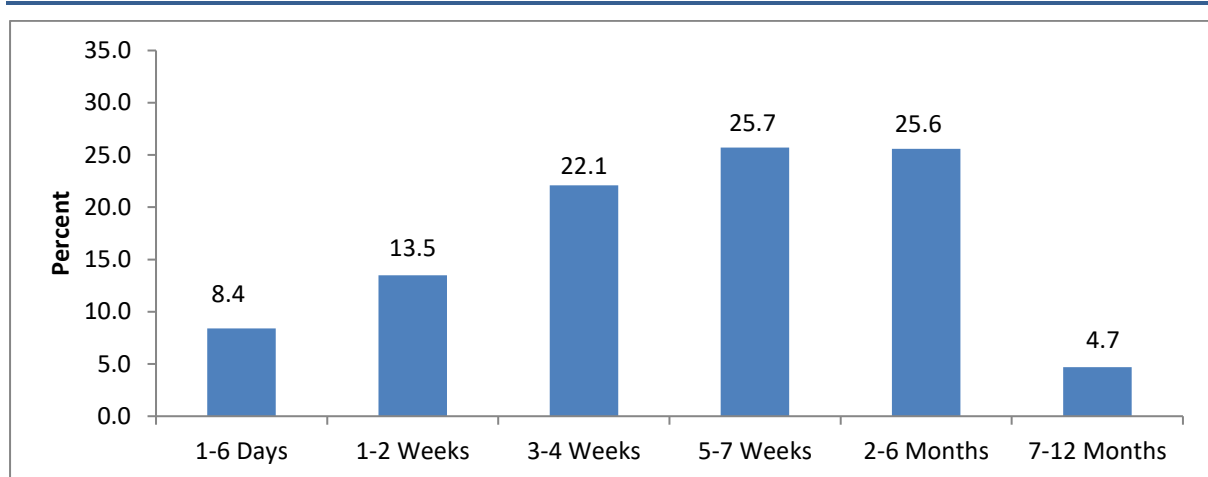
*Source:* Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

*Note:* The information presented here relates specifically to injuries that required surgery, hospitalisation or time off from training and/or competition.

Less than 5 per cent of players who sustained an injury were out from training and/or playing for more than 6 months (Figure 6.3). Just over 50 per cent were out for either 5–7 weeks (26 per cent) or 2–6 months (26 per cent), while the remaining 44 per cent were out for less than a month.<sup>98</sup>

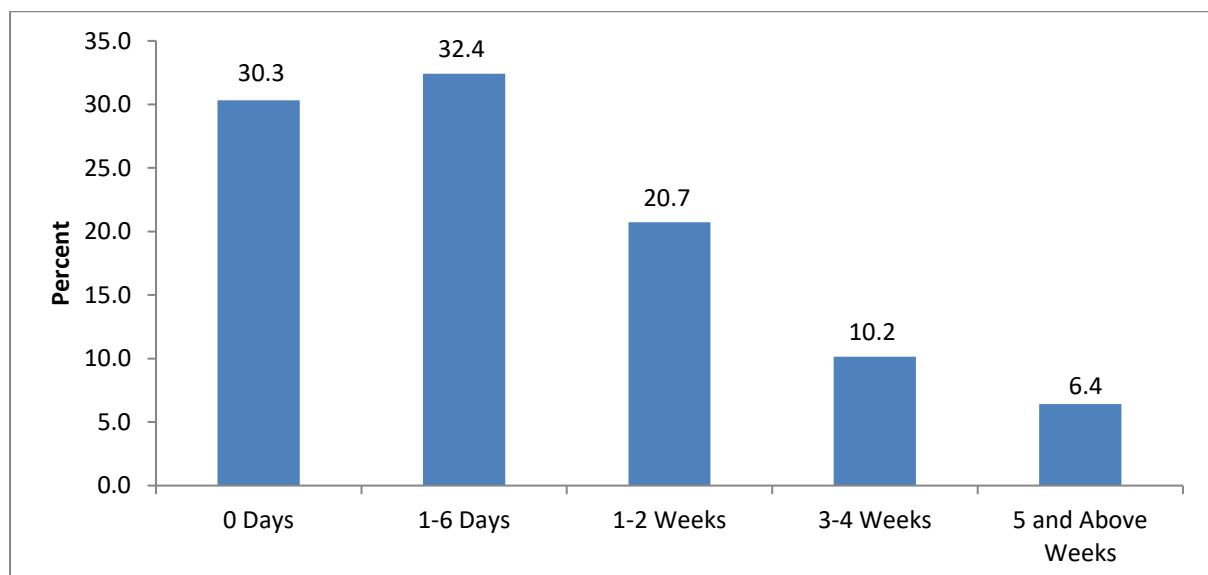
<sup>98</sup> For a breakdown by code, see Appendix Figure D.1.4.



**FIGURE 6.3 DURATION ABSENT FROM TRAINING AND/OR PLAYING DUE TO INJURY DURING THE 2016 SEASON: OVERALL**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Regarding players' professional careers, just over 30 per cent did not require an absence from work/college when they sustained their injury during the 2016 season (Figure 6.4). Almost a third (32 per cent) missed between one and six days, with 6 per cent out for five weeks or more.<sup>99</sup>

**FIGURE 6.4 DURATION ABSENT FROM WORK/COLLEGE DUE TO INJURY DURING THE 2016 SEASON: OVERALL**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

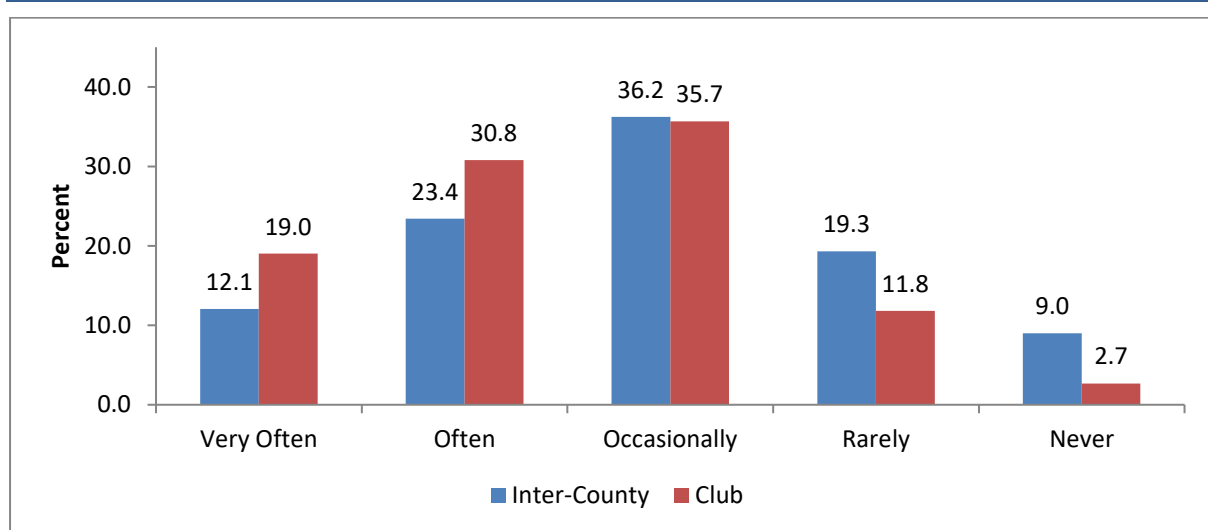
<sup>99</sup> A breakdown by code is presented in Appendix Figure D.1.5.

### 6.3 PLAYING AND/OR TRAINING WHEN INJURED

Players were asked how often during their senior inter-county career (not specific to the 2016 season) they had played either an inter-county or a club match, or trained with either team, when injured.

Fifty per cent of players often/very often played a club match when injured (Figure 6.5). The corresponding figure for playing an inter-county match was 35.5 per cent. Consequently, a larger proportion of players rarely or never played a county match when injured: 28 per cent compared to 14.5 per cent for a club game.<sup>100</sup>

**FIGURE 6.5 FREQUENCY OF PLAYING INTER-COUNTY OR CLUB MATCHES WHEN INJURED: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL**



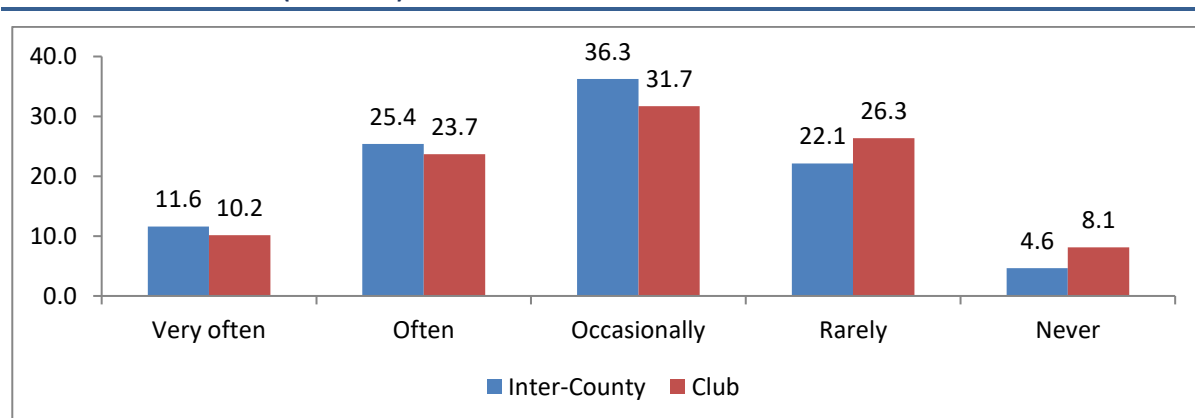
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Thirty-seven per cent of players often/very often trained with their inter-county team when injured (Figure 6.6). This is almost identical to the percentage that often/very often played with this team when injured (36 per cent, Figure 6.5).

With regard to training with their club when injured, a smaller proportion of players did this relative to playing with their club when injured. Specifically, 34 per cent often/very often trained with their club when injured (Figure 6.6) compared to 50 per cent often/very often playing with their club when carrying an injury (Figure 6.5).<sup>101</sup>

<sup>100</sup> A breakdown by code and playing level is presented in Appendix Figures D.2.1–D.2.6.

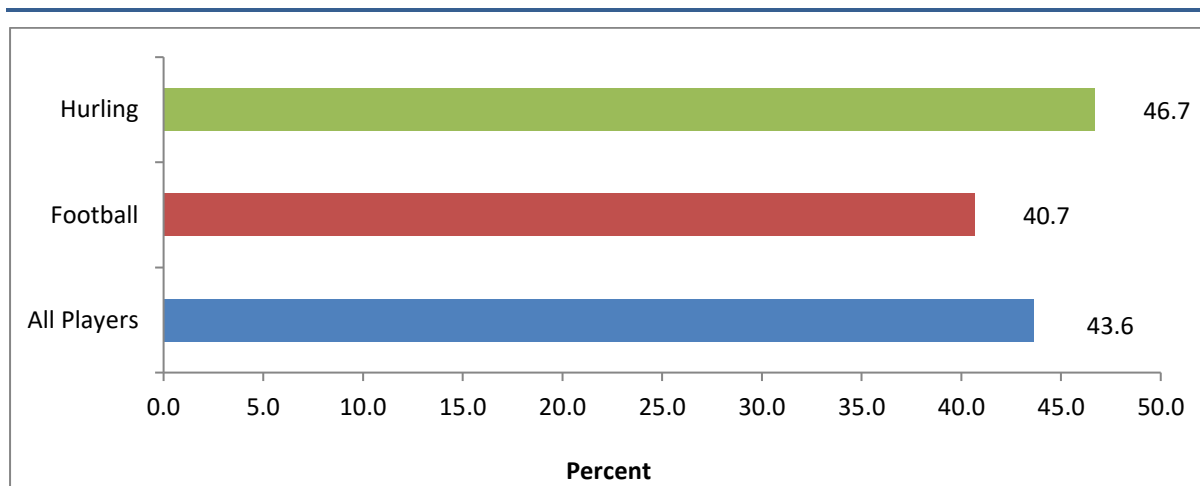
<sup>101</sup> Analyses by code and playing level are presented in Appendix Figures D.2.7–D.2.12.

**FIGURE 6.6 FREQUENCY OF TRAINING WITH INTER-COUNTY OR CLUB TEAM WHEN INJURED: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL (PER CENT)**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Players were asked if they ever felt pressurised to play a senior inter-county match when injured. The source of this pressure was not specified; thus, the responses given could relate to pressure that the players put on themselves (not wanting the time and effort that they had put into their training to go to waste, wanting to keep their place on the team, wanting to make the starting 15, etc.) as much as external pressure, whether actual or perceived.

Forty-four per cent of players indicated that they felt pressurised to play a senior inter-county match when injured (Figure 6.7). This was marginally higher among hurlers: 47 per cent compared to 41 per cent among footballers.<sup>102</sup>

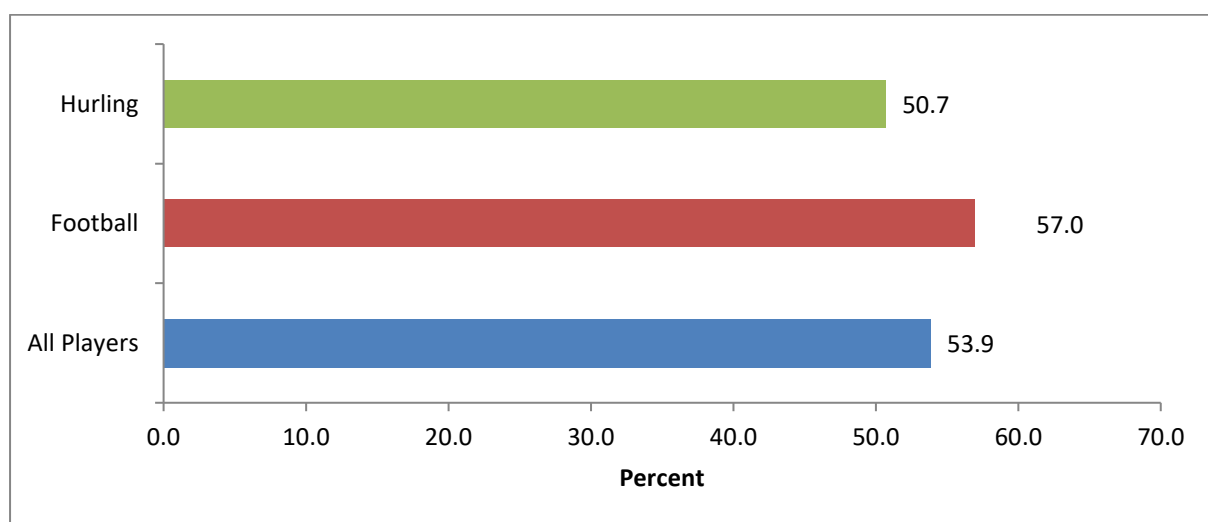
**FIGURE 6.7 FELT PRESSURISED TO PLAY INTER-COUNTY GAME WHEN INJURED: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND CODE**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

<sup>102</sup> For a breakdown by age, see Appendix Figure D.3.1.

The players who indicated that they played a senior inter-county match when injured (Figure 6.5) were asked if they had ever received medication to do so.<sup>103</sup> Fifty-four per cent said that they had (Figure 6.8), with this percentage slightly higher among footballers – 57 per cent compared to 51 per cent of hurlers.

**FIGURE 6.8 RECEIVED MEDICATION TO PLAY INTER-COUNTY MATCH WHEN INJURED: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND CODE**

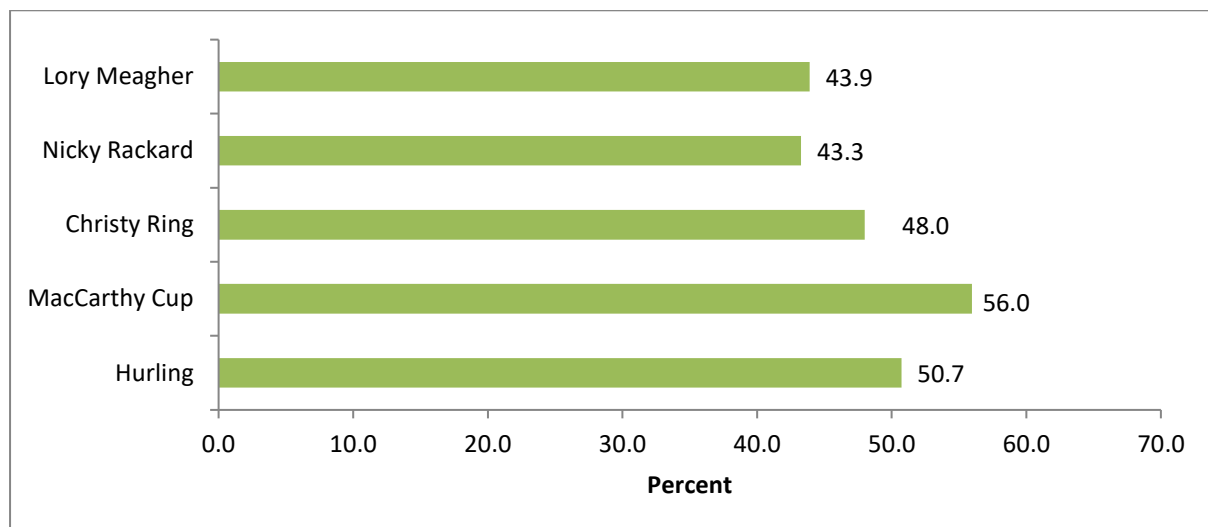


*Source:* Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

*Note:* Calculation based only on 2016 players who played an inter-county match when injured.

However, when we examined this by playing level we found that a larger percentage of MacCarthy Cup hurlers received medication to help them to play a county game when injured compared to hurlers in the other grades (Figure 6.9): 56 per cent compared to an average of 45 per cent of Christy Ring, Nicky Rackard and Lory Meagher players.

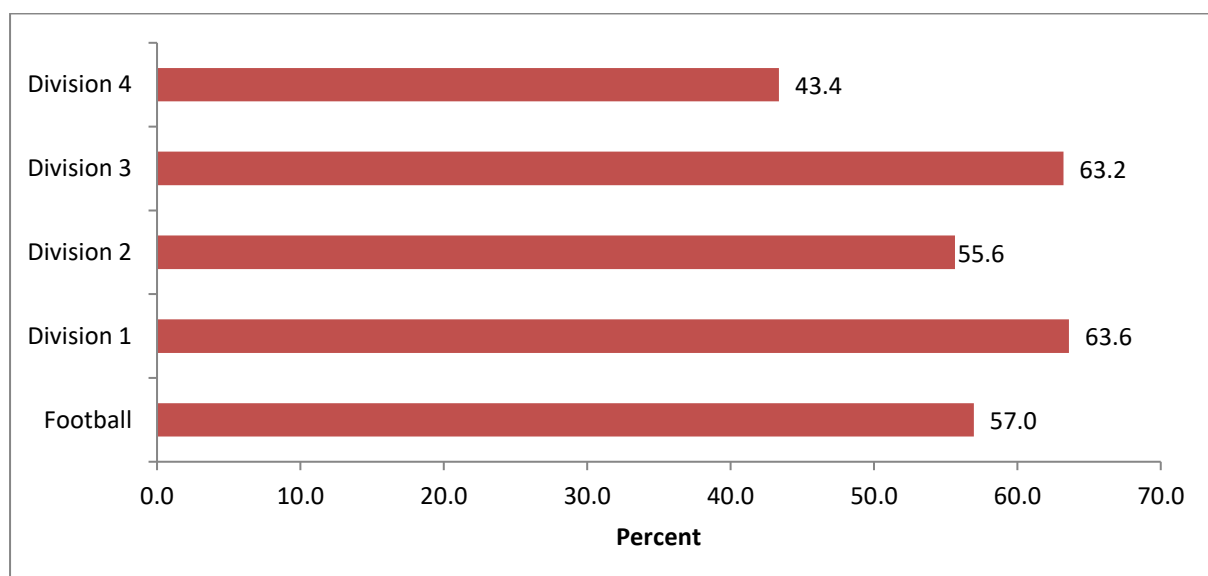
<sup>103</sup> 'Did you ever receive medication to assist you to play a senior inter-county match while injured?'

**FIGURE 6.9 RECEIVED MEDICATION TO PLAY INTER-COUNTY MATCH WHEN INJURED: 2016 HURLERS**

*Source:* Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

*Note:* Calculation based only on 2016 hurlers who played an inter-county match when injured.

This MacCarthy Cup hurlers' percentage (56) was the same as that for Division 2 footballers (Figure 6.10). However, higher percentages of Division 1 and 3 footballers received medication to assist them to play for their county team when injured compared to Division 2 and 4 footballers: 63–64 per cent compared to an average of 50 per cent of Division 2 and 4 players.

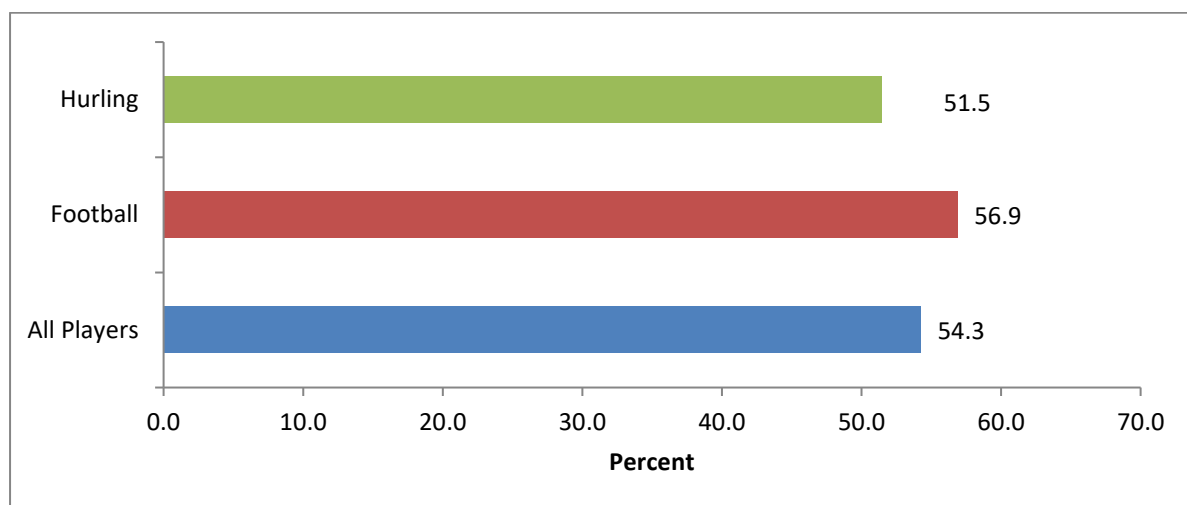
**FIGURE 6.10 RECEIVED MEDICATION TO PLAY INTER-COUNTY MATCH WHEN INJURED: 2016 FOOTBALLERS**

*Source:* Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

*Note:* Calculation based only on 2016 footballers who played an inter-county match when injured.

Players who indicated that they had played for their club when injured (Figure 6.5) were also asked if they had ever received medication to help them to do so.<sup>104</sup> The results reveal that the same proportion of this group of players received medication as did players who received medication to play a senior inter-county match when injured: 54 per cent (Figure 6.11). This proportion was, again, slightly higher among footballers: 57 per cent compared to 52 per cent of hurlers.

**FIGURE 6.11 RECEIVED MEDICATION TO PLAY CLUB MATCH WHEN INJURED: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND CODE**

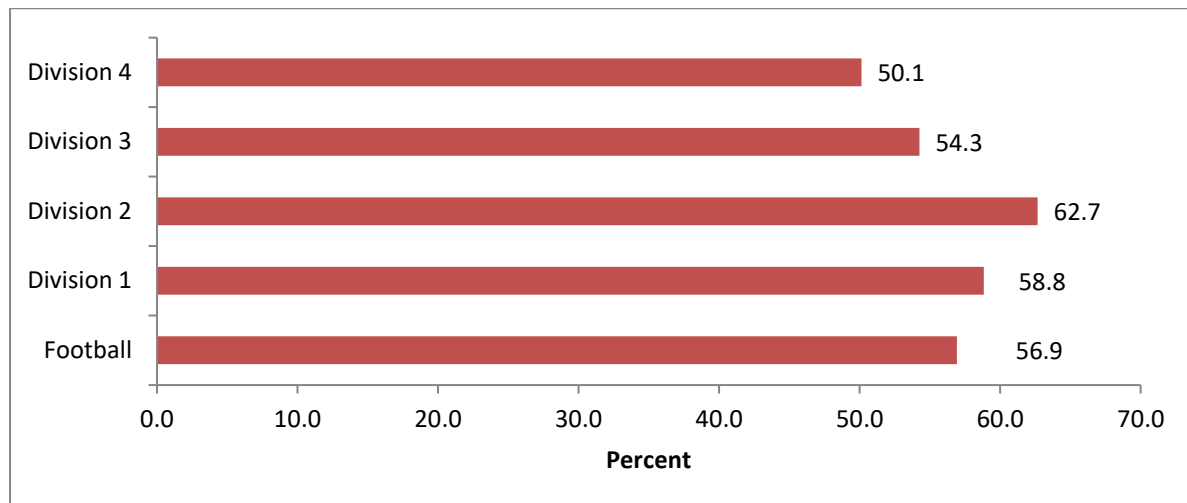


*Source:* Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

*Note:* Calculation based only on 2016 players who played a club match when injured.

Among footballers (Figure 6.12), a higher proportion of Division 1 and 2 footballers received medication to play a club game when injured (an average of 61 per cent) compared to Division 3 and 4 players (an average of 52 per cent).

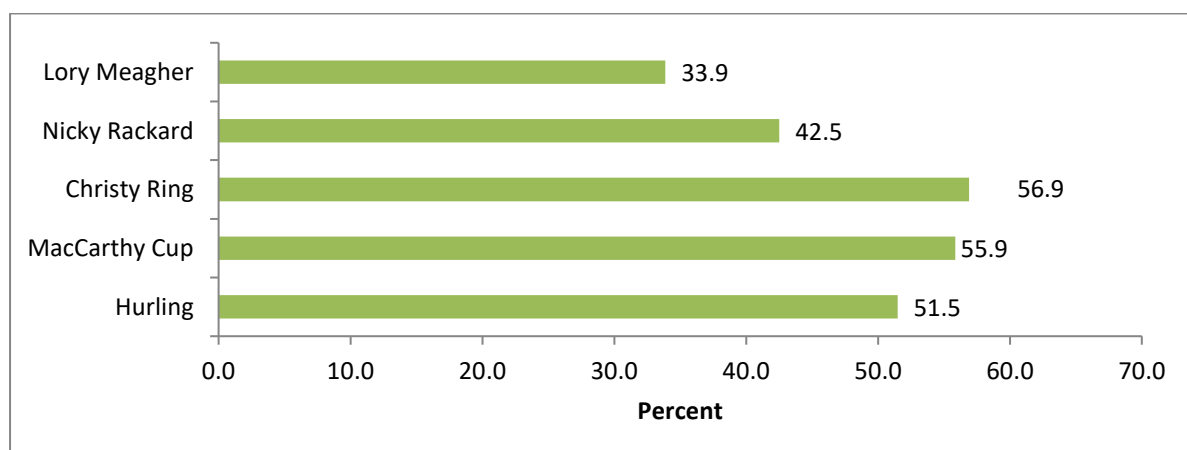
<sup>104</sup> 'Did you ever receive medication to assist you to play a club match while injured?'

**FIGURE 6.12 RECEIVED MEDICATION TO PLAY CLUB MATCH WHEN INJURED: 2016 FOOTBALLERS**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: Calculation based only on 2016 footballers who played a club match when injured.

For hurlers (Figure 6.13), greater proportions of MacCarthy Cup and Christy Ring players received medication to play a club match when injured: 56 and 57 per cent respectively compared to an average of 40 per cent of Nicky Rackard and Lory Meagher players.

**FIGURE 6.13 RECEIVED MEDICATION TO PLAY CLUB MATCH WHEN INJURED: 2016 HURLERS**

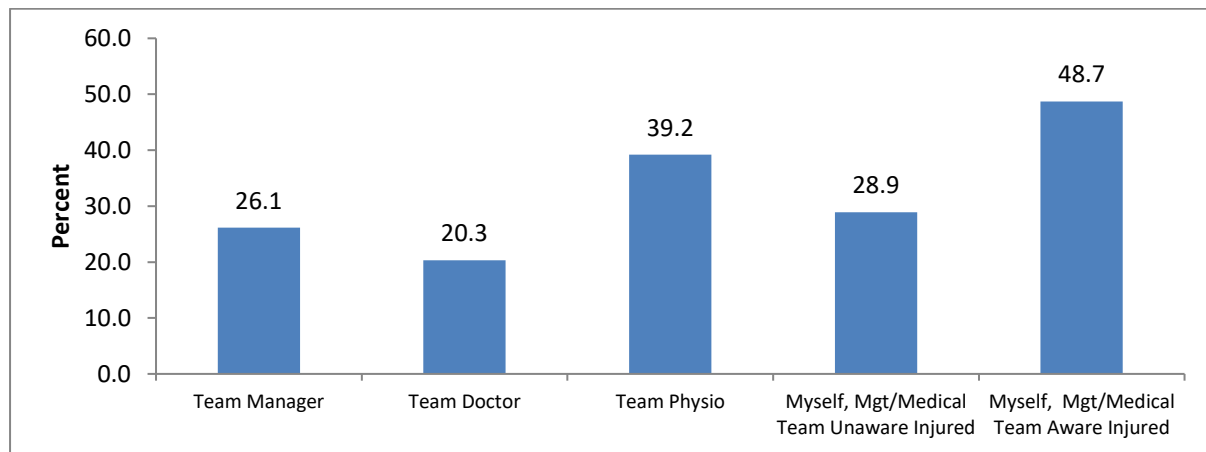
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: Calculation based only on 2016 hurlers who played a club match when injured.

Players were asked who made the final decision within the inter-county team set-up as to whether or not they played when injured. For players for whom this situation arose, 49 per cent (Figure 6.14) indicated that they made this decision,

with their management and medical teams aware of their injury. This was followed by the team physiotherapist (39 per cent), and then players making the final call themselves without their management or medical teams being aware of their injury (29 per cent).<sup>105</sup> Not all players may have access to a team doctor (e.g. the lower division hurling teams); this may have affected the result identified for this category.

**FIGURE 6.14 FINAL DECISION MAKER ON PLAYING INTER-COUNTY MATCH WHEN INJURED: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

#### 6.4 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' WELL-BEING

In order to measure players' mental well-being, the World Health Organisation-Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5) was included in the SSICP-2016 questionnaire. The WHO-5 is a self-reported measure that captures an individual's psychological well-being over the previous two weeks. This means that the results presented in this report relate to players' well-being between May and August 2017.

Specifically, players were asked to indicate the extent to which they had (over the previous two weeks) (i) felt cheerful and in good spirits, (ii) felt calm and relaxed, (iii) felt active and vigorous, (iv) woke up feeling fresh and rested, and (v) the extent to which daily life had been filled with things that interested them. The response to each of the five statements goes from zero to five, with zero indicating 'at no time' and five 'all of the time'. The WHO-5 score derived from this information ranges from zero to 100, with higher scores indicating greater mental well-being.<sup>106</sup> According to Topp et al. (2015), individuals with a WHO-5 score of 50 or

<sup>105</sup> The same pattern emerged when we examined this separately for 2016 footballers and hurlers (see Appendix Figure D.3.2).

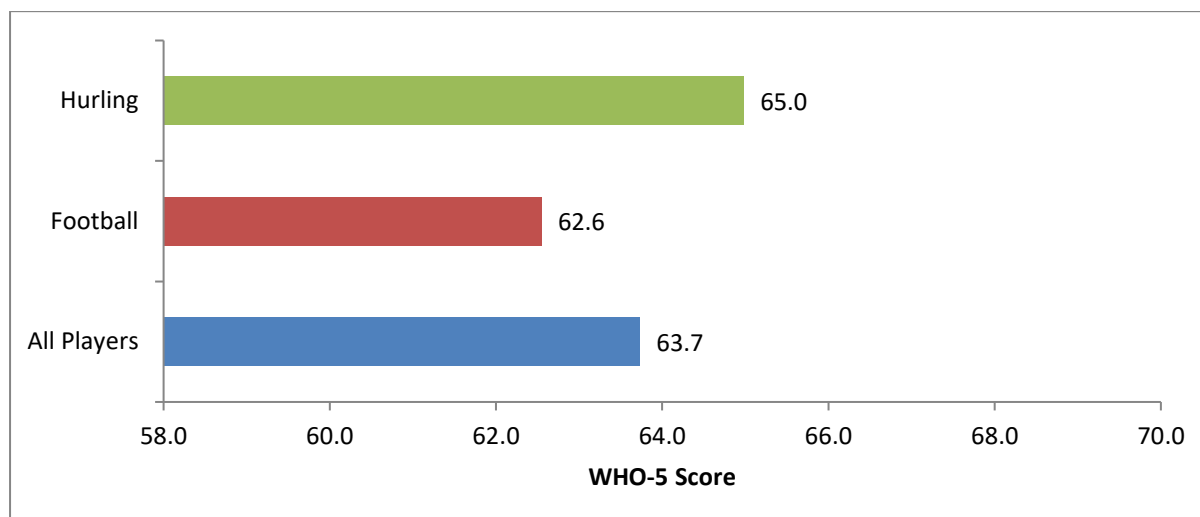
<sup>106</sup> The raw score, which is calculated by totalling the responses to the five WHO-5 statements, ranges from 0 to 25. To obtain a percentage score ranging from 0 to 100, the raw score is multiplied by four. A percentage score of 0 represents the worst possible quality of life, while a score of 100 indicates the best.



lower are considered *at risk* of depression.

The average WHO-5 score for 2016 players was 64 (Figure 6.15).<sup>107</sup> Given that higher scores indicate greater psychological well-being, this value would suggest that players had relatively good mental health between May and August 2017. In addition, their measure of 64 is 14 units above the threshold value of 50 that Topp et al. (2015) identified as the level at which individuals are at risk of depression.

**FIGURE 6.15 WHO-5 MENTAL WELL-BEING INDEX: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND CODE (SCORE)**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Nevertheless, when we compare 2016 players' mental well-being to the general population we find that it is somewhat lower. Specifically, based on data from the *European Quality of Life Survey 2016* (EQLS-2016), the most recent WHO-5 score for Ireland,<sup>108</sup> which relates to 2016, was 70. 2016 players' mental well-being was also lower than that of all males in Ireland in 2016 (72), and than that of individuals of similar age (73 for those aged 18 to 34). The score for the EU as a whole in 2016 was 64.<sup>109</sup>

There are a number of reasons why this discrepancy might exist. First, the WHO-5 score may vary according to the time of year that it is calculated: 2016 players' score of 64 relates to a two-week period between May and August 2017, while the EQLS-2016 values were for a two-week time point between September 2016 and February 2017. Calculation of the WHO-5 measure can vary from year to year too: while the EQLS-2016 recorded a score of 70 for Ireland in 2016, the corresponding

<sup>107</sup> For a breakdown by playing level and age, see Appendix Figures D.4.1–D.4.3.

<sup>108</sup> This WHO-5 measure was calculated using information captured in a questionnaire that was administered (through face-to-face interviews) to a targeted sample of 1,000 individuals aged 18 or older.

<sup>109</sup> <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/data/european-quality-of-life-survey> (accessed 16 March 2018).

value in 2012 was 64.<sup>110</sup>

In addition, what people have going on in their lives when providing the information used to calculate the mental well-being measure can impact the derived value. In this regard, 2016 players were in the middle of the championship season, particularly the footballers and MacCarthy Cup hurlers, when the information used to construct the WHO-5 measure was gathered. This will have been an intensive period for the players, from a mental as much as a physical perspective. Thus, some players may have registered lower values for some of the statements used to construct the overall WHO-5 measure during this time period compared to what they might record during less intense playing periods.

To examine this issue in more detail, Table 6.1 gives a breakdown of the players' responses to the five statements used to construct the overall WHO-5 score; specifically, the percentage that responded 'most to all of the time' for each statement. For comparative purposes, we also include what these breakdowns were for Ireland in 2016.

**TABLE 6.1 'MOST TO ALL OF THE TIME' RESPONSES TO WHO-5 STATEMENTS: 2016 PLAYERS COMPARED TO THE GENERAL POPULATION IN IRELAND (PERCENTAGE)**

	Cheerful and in Good Spirits	Calm and Relaxed	Active and Vigorous	Fresh and Rested	Daily Life Filled with Things that Interest Me
<b>Measurement period: 2017</b>					
All players	63.8	59.6	54.3	25.9	42.0
Footballers	59.8	55.6	54.4	22.1	40.5
Hurlers	68.0	63.7	54.2	29.8	43.6
<b>Measurement period: 2016</b>					
Ireland	78.0	72.0	59.0	57.0	67.0
Aged 18–24	82.0	74.0	56.0	53.0	70.0
Aged 25–34	79.0	73.0	63.0	57.0	73.0
Males	79.0	76.0	63.0	59.0	72.0

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016) and European Quality of Life Survey 2016.<sup>111</sup>

The first important point to note is that only just over a quarter (26 per cent) of players indicated that they woke up feeling 'fresh and rested' most to all of the time during the 2017 championship. This percentage was lower among footballers: 22 per cent compared to 30 per cent of hurlers. The comparable figure for the

<sup>110</sup> 63 for those aged 18 to 24, 62 for those aged 25 to 34 and 66 for males.

<sup>111</sup> <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/data/european-quality-of-life-survey> (accessed 9 July 2018).

population as a whole in Ireland in 2016 was 57 per cent.

For all of the WHO-5 score statements, the percentage of players that responded 'most to all of the time' was smaller compared to the full population, with footballers recording lower values than hurlers. This includes the statement 'I have felt active and vigorous (over the previous two weeks)', which is one area where one might have expected the percentage responding 'most to all of the time' to be larger among players.

While it is positive that 2016 players recorded a WHO-5 score (64) that is above the threshold level for being at risk of depression (50), their mental well-being is still lower to what it is for the population as a whole in Ireland.

In addition to examining players' mental well-being, we also investigated their subjective well-being. Specifically, the question asked identifies how players evaluated their life as a whole at the time of the survey (2017). The life satisfaction scale used goes from one to ten, with one indicating very dissatisfied with life and ten very satisfied.<sup>112</sup>

The average life satisfaction score for 2016 players was 7.2 (Figure 6.16).<sup>113</sup> Based on EQLS-2016 data, the most recent average life satisfaction score for Ireland (2016) was 7.7.<sup>114</sup> This population measure is only marginally higher than that of the 2016 players, which would suggest that there is very little difference, if any, between players and the general population with regard to how satisfied they are with their life.

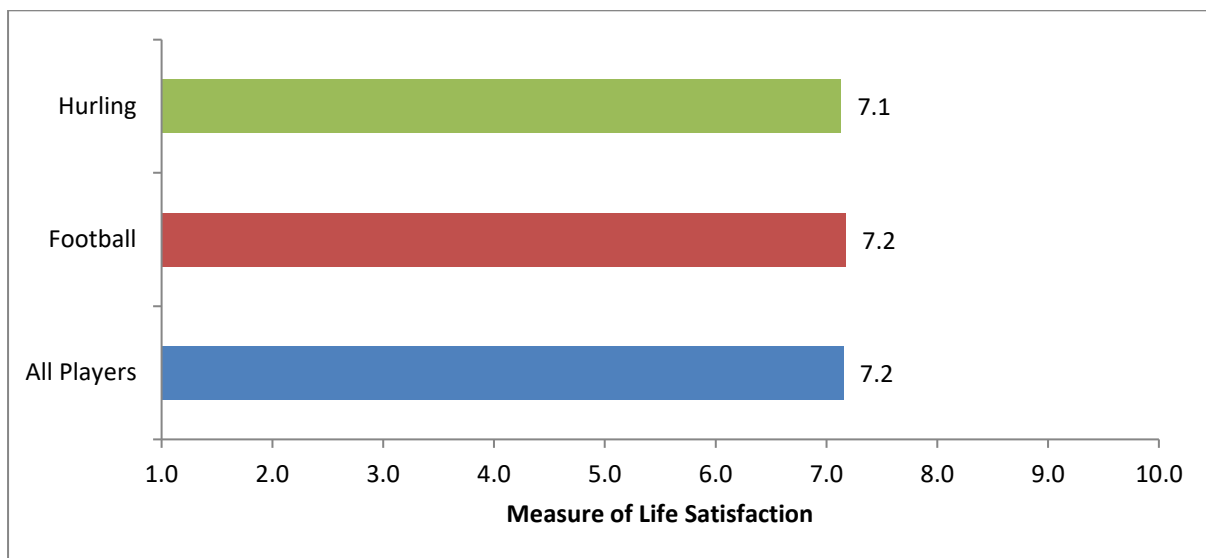
In comparing inter-county players with the general population, the contrast in the life satisfaction finding with that of the mental health result is worth noting. There was very little, if any, difference between the two groups in relation to life satisfaction, but a difference did exist in their mental well-being.

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<sup>112</sup> The following internationally recognised, and validated, life satisfaction measure was included in the player questionnaire: 'All things considered, how satisfied would you say you are with your life these days? Please tell us on a scale of 1–10, where 1 means very dissatisfied and 10 means very satisfied.'

<sup>113</sup> For a breakdown by age, see Appendix Figure D.4.4.

<sup>114</sup> It was 7.4 in 2012. For the EU as a whole, the average life satisfaction score was 7.1 in both 2016 and 2012: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/data/european-quality-of-life-survey> (accessed 16 March 2018).

**FIGURE 6.16 LIFE SATISFACTION: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND CODE (AVERAGE)**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

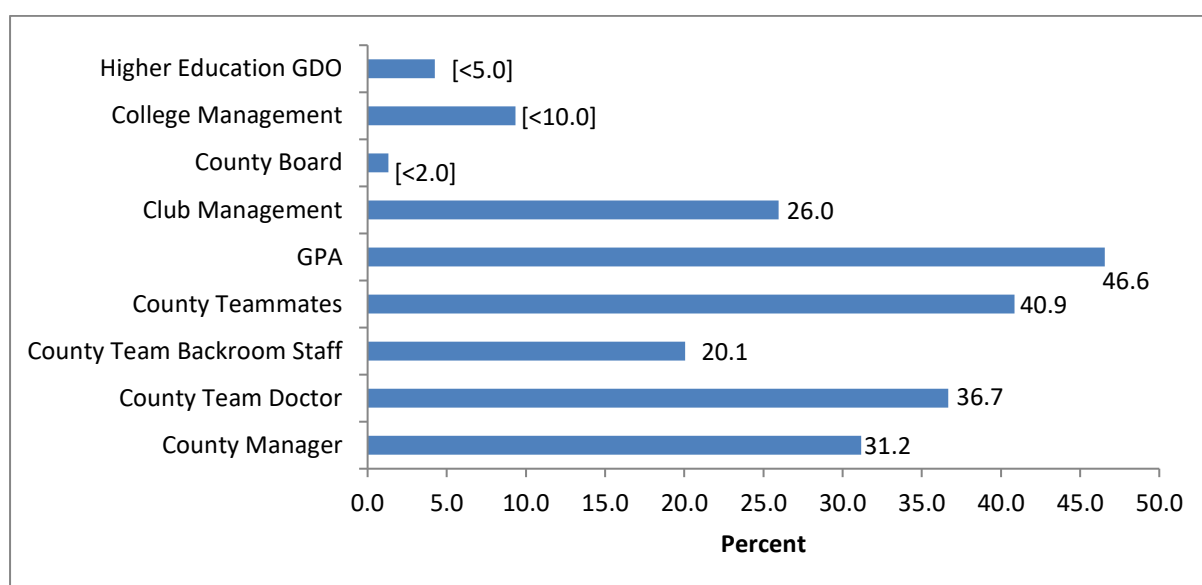
In the SSICP-2016 questionnaire, players were given a list of individuals and asked who they would feel comfortable approaching if they had an emotional or mental health difficulty.

The GPA ranked first, with almost half (47 per cent) of players indicating that they would feel comfortable approaching the players' representative body if they had an emotional or mental health difficulty (Figure 6.17). This was followed by their teammates (41 per cent), the county team doctor (37 per cent) and the county team manager (31 per cent). Very few players would approach their county board (less than 2 per cent).

A greater percentage of hurlers would be more likely to approach the GPA – 50 per cent compared to 44 per cent of footballers – while a greater proportion of footballers were more likely to confide in their county team doctor – 41 per cent compared to 32 per cent of hurlers (Figure 6.18).<sup>115</sup>

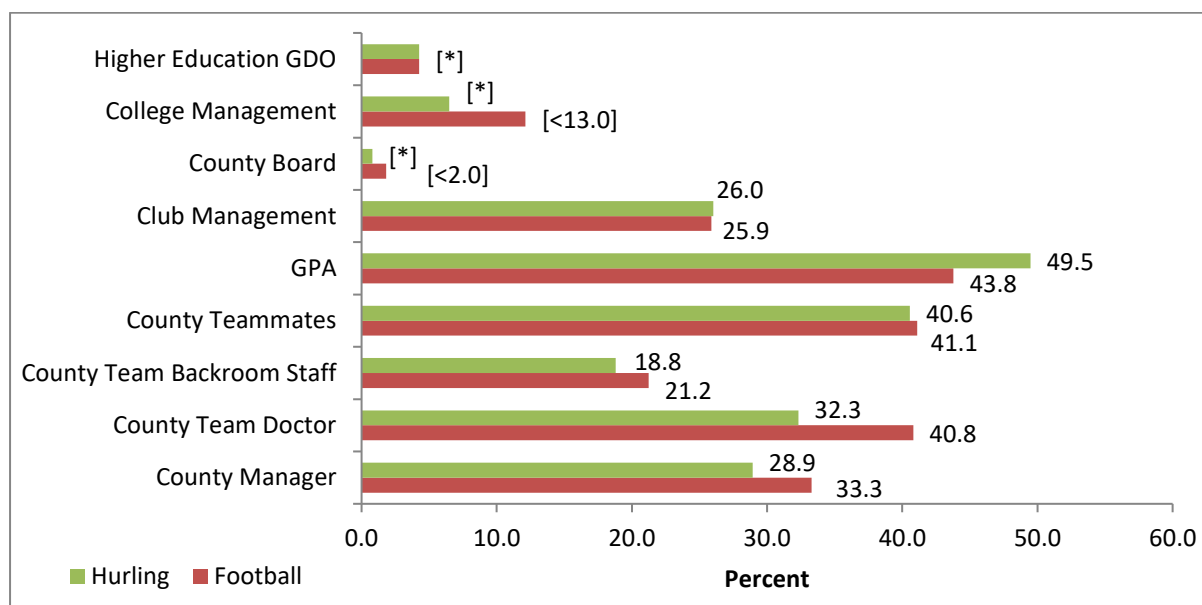
<sup>115</sup> For a breakdown by playing level, see Appendix Figures D.4.5 and D.4.6.

**FIGURE 6.17 INDIVIDUAL THAT PLAYERS WOULD FEEL COMFORTABLE APPROACHING IF THEY HAD EMOTIONAL OR MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTY: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL**



*Source:* Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).  
*Note:* College Management and HE GDO responses relate to players who were in Higher Education in January 2016. The percentages in square brackets ([]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

**FIGURE 6.18 INDIVIDUAL THAT PLAYERS WOULD FEEL COMFORTABLE APPROACHING IF THEY HAD EMOTIONAL OR MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTY: 2016 PLAYERS – CODE**



*Source:* Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).  
*Note:* College Management and HE GDO responses relate to players who were in HE in January 2016. The percentages in square brackets ([]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution. [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

Further variation exists in who players would confide in if they had an emotional or mental health difficulty by playing level (see Appendix Figures D.4.5 and D.4.6).

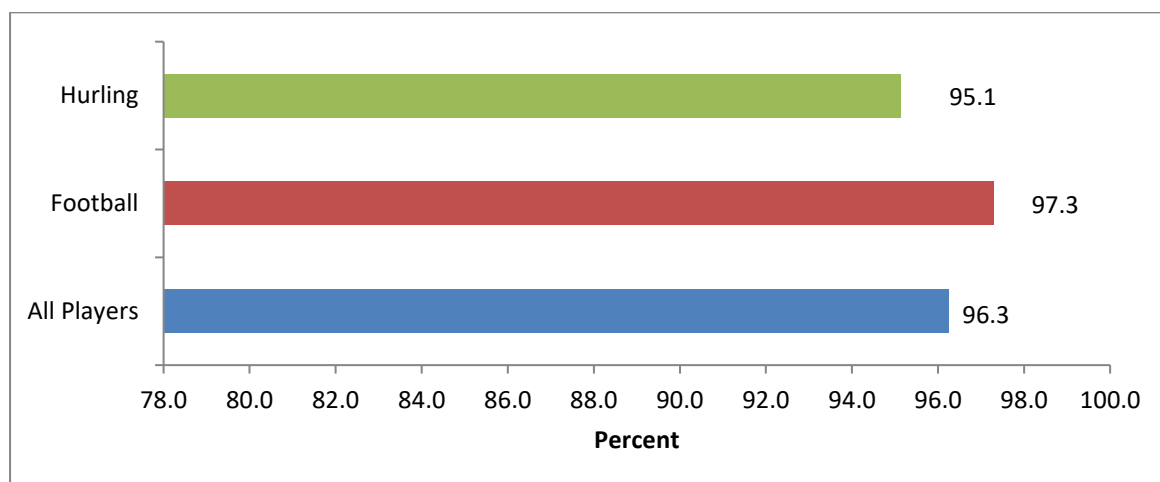
In interpreting these findings, it is important to note that the response options given for this question in the SSICP-2016 questionnaire that were available to all players (e.g., teammates, manager, GPA, etc.) will have had a higher chance of being selected. Thus, the finding that the GPA is the main body that players would feel comfortable approaching could, in part, be due to the fact that all players have access to the GPA whereas not all players may have access to a team doctor (e.g., the lower division hurling teams). Even for teams that do have a team doctor, he/she might only be available on match day, thereby not enabling players to develop a relationship with such a person for them to consider approaching him/her if they had an emotional or mental health difficulty.

## 6.5 PLAYERS' VIEWS ON THE EFFECTS OF THEIR INTER-COUNTY COMMITMENTS

### 6.5.1 Time

Given the senior inter-county commitments documented in Chapter 5, it should not be surprising that 96 per cent of players felt that such training, playing and other related commitments took up a large amount of their time (Figure 6.19).<sup>116</sup>

**FIGURE 6.19 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY TRAINING, PLAYING AND RELATED COMMITMENTS TAKE UP A LARGE AMOUNT OF TIME: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND CODE**



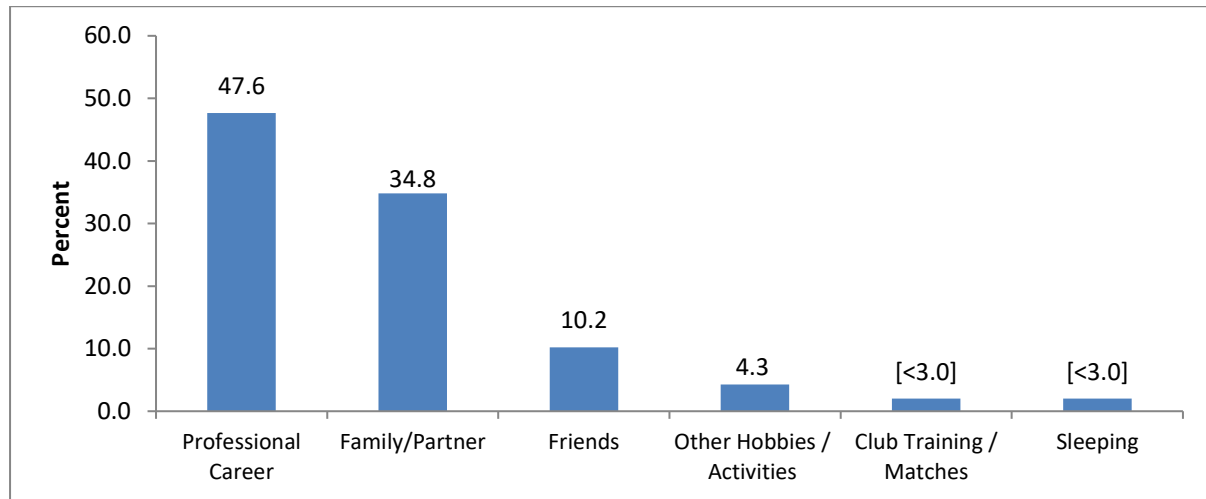
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Players identified their professional career as being one key area that was being affected by this commitment. Specifically, 48 per cent of players wanted to spend more time on this part of their life but were unable to do so because of their inter-county commitments (Figure 6.20). This was followed by players wanting to spend

<sup>116</sup> For a breakdown by playing level, see Appendix Figures D.5.1 and D.5.2.

more time with their family/partner (35 per cent), with friends (10 per cent) and on other hobbies/activities outside of inter-county (4 per cent).<sup>117</sup>

**FIGURE 6.20 OTHER LIFE AREAS PLAYERS WOULD LIKE TO SPEND MORE TIME ON: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL**

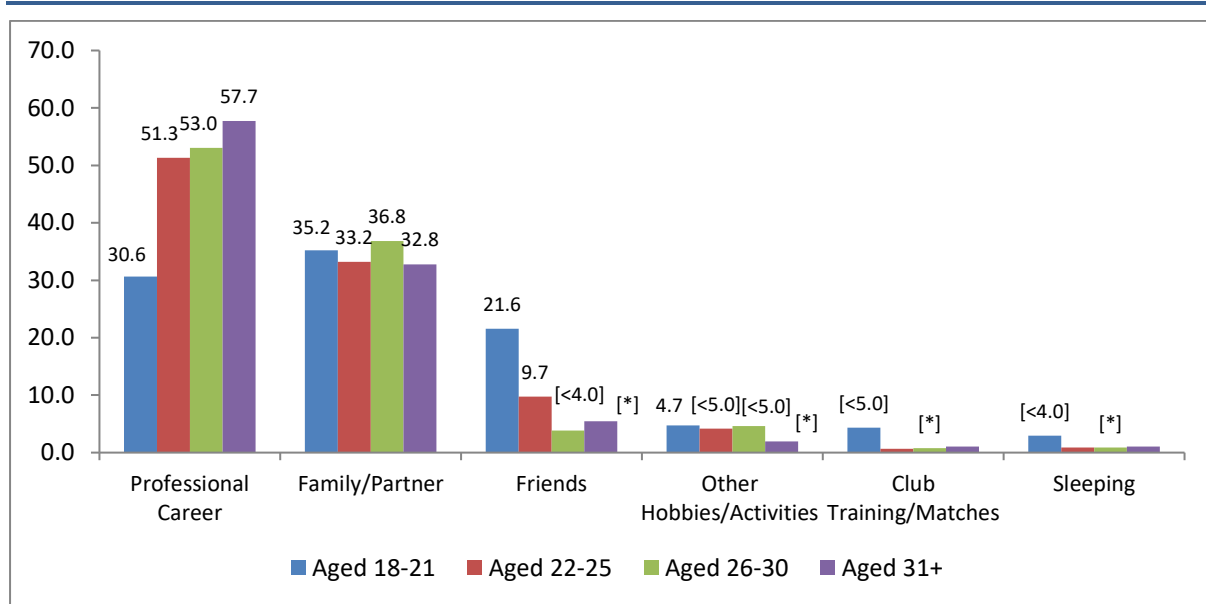


*Source:* Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

*Note:* The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

Older players in particular wanted to spend more time on their professional career, and younger players time with their friends (Figure 6.21). Regardless of age, very few players indicated that they would like to sleep more, or allocate more time to club training/matches.

<sup>117</sup> See Appendix Figure D.5.3 for a breakdown by code.

**FIGURE 6.21 OTHER LIFE AREAS PLAYERS WOULD LIKE TO SPEND MORE TIME ON: 2016 PLAYERS – AGE GROUP (PER CENT)**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution. [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

### 6.5.2 Downsides

Having less time to spend with their family, partner and/or friends was identified by players as being the main downside to playing senior inter-county (Table 6.2). This is something that appears to become more problematic as players age, as it was cited as an issue by 80 per cent of players aged 26 to 30 and by 91 per cent of those aged over 30.

Another downside is the time commitments, with just over half of players indicating that the time commitments involved in playing at this level were too much.

Getting to spend less time with their club was ranked as the third main downside, followed by players feeling that their professional career was being negatively affected by playing senior inter-county.

The other main downsides cited by players were their county having no chance of winning a provincial/All-Ireland title (24 per cent) and ongoing injury/injuries (22 per cent).<sup>118</sup>

<sup>118</sup> For a breakdown by playing level, see Appendix Tables D.5.1 and D.5.2.



**TABLE 6.2 MAIN DOWNSIDES OF PLAYING INTER-COUNTY: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND AGE GROUP (PER CENT)**

	All Players	Aged 18–21	Aged 22–25	Aged 26–30	Aged 31+
Less time with family/partner/friends	76.6	71.0	74.0	80.0	91.0
Time commitments too much	52.4	52.0	54.0	52.0	48.0
Less time with club	43.5	39.0	44.0	46.0	45.0
Professional career negatively affected	35.4	32.0	37.0	35.0	39.0
County no chance of winning	23.6	29.0	23.0	24.0	[<14.0]
Ongoing injury/injuries	21.7	19.0	23.0	23.0	20.0
Other	3.7	*	[<5.0]	*	*
No downside	2.5	[<6.0]	*	*	*

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

Players were asked if they had to give up or reduce their participation in other activities as a result of becoming an inter-county player from a club player only; specifically: (i) participating in other sports (soccer, cycling, etc.), (ii) training with their club or college team, (iii) playing with their club or college team, (iv) spending time with their family, partner and/or friends, (v) participating in other hobbies/interests, or (vi) if there was anything else ('Other' in Tables 6.3 and 6.4). Players who answered 'yes' were asked to indicate whether or not this situation currently bothered them.

Ninety-two per cent of players indicated that they had to reduce the amount of time that they could devote to their family, partner and/or friends as a result of becoming an inter-county player from a club player only (Table 6.3). This bothered 74 per cent, particularly older players. Specifically, 79 per cent of those aged over 30 were not happy with having to spend less time with their family/partner/friends compared to 62 per cent of players aged 18 to 21 (Table 6.4).

Another 90 per cent of players said that they had to cease/reduce participating in other hobbies/interests, and it currently bothered 59 per cent.

**TABLE 6.3 CEASED/REDUCED INVOLVEMENT IN NON-INTER-COUNTY ACTIVITIES AS A RESULT OF BECOMING AN INTER-COUNTY PLAYER FROM A CLUB PLAYER ONLY: 2016 PLAYERS (PER CENT)**

	Yes	It Doesn't Currently Bother Me	It Currently Bothers Me
Spending time with family/partner/friends	91.7	26.3	73.7
Participating in other hobbies/interests	89.8	41.1	58.9
Training with club or college team	89.5	45.5	54.5
Playing with club or college team	80.8	38.1	61.9
Participating in other sports	80.8	63.3	36.7
Other	27.7	36.7	63.3

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Ninety per cent indicated that they had to reduce training with their club/college team. Fifty-five per cent of players were not currently happy with this, but this proportion was lower among those aged over 30 and aged 18 to 21: 45 and 47 per cent respectively (Table 6.4). Eighty-one per cent said that they had to stop/reduce playing with these teams, of which 62 per cent had difficulty with this (Table 6.3). Again, the percentage of those aged 18 to 21 and aged over 30 that had difficulty with this were smaller: 53 and 54 per cent respectively (Table 6.4). Eighty-one per cent of players also said that they had to cease/cut back on playing other sports, and this bothered 37 per cent (Table 6.3).

'Other' activities that players had to give up/reduce involvement in that currently bothered them (63 per cent in Table 6.3) included socialising/relationships, professional career, travel and holidays. This was particularly the case for players aged between 22 and 30 (Table 6.4).

**TABLE 6.4 CEASED/REDUCED INVOLVEMENT IN NON-INTER-COUNTY ACTIVITIES AS A RESULT OF BECOMING AN INTER-COUNTY PLAYER FROM CLUB PLAYER ONLY AND IT CURRENTLY BOTHERS ME: 2016 PLAYERS – AGE GROUP (PER CENT)**

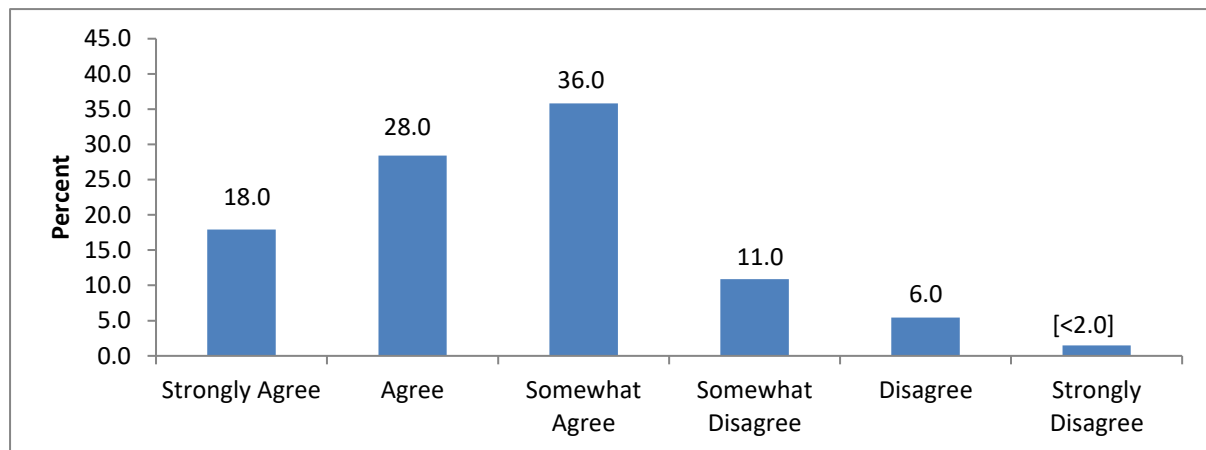
	All Players	Aged 18–21	Aged 22–25	Aged 26–30	Aged 31+
Spending time with family/partner/friends	73.7	62.4	74.3	78.8	78.7
Other	63.3	54.7	65.2	69.0	51.6
Playing with club or college team	61.9	53.1	63.6	68.5	54.0
Participating in other hobbies/interests	58.9	56.0	57.7	62.0	57.2
Training with club or college team	54.5	47.4	55.2	58.8	44.9
Participating in other sports	36.7	32.8	37.0	39.7	32.1

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

### 6.5.3 Other aspects of playing senior inter-county

Forty-six per cent of players agreed/strongly agreed that too much effort is demanded of them as players (Figure 6.22). Another 36 per cent somewhat agreed with this, which gives a total of 82 per cent being of the view that too much effort is demanded of them.<sup>119</sup>

**FIGURE 6.22 'TOO MUCH EFFORT IS DEMANDED OF US AS PLAYERS': 2016 PLAYERS**



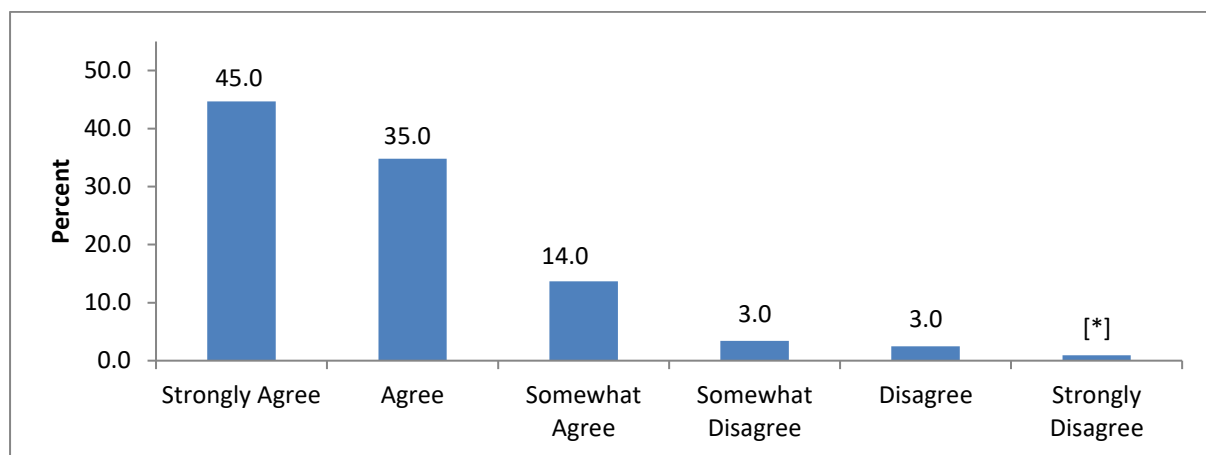
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

Eighty per cent agreed/strongly agreed that the working conditions associated with their paid job needed to be flexible to enable them to play inter-county (Figure 6.23).<sup>120</sup>

<sup>119</sup> See Appendix Figure D.5.4 for a breakdown by code, and Table D.5.3 for responses by playing level.

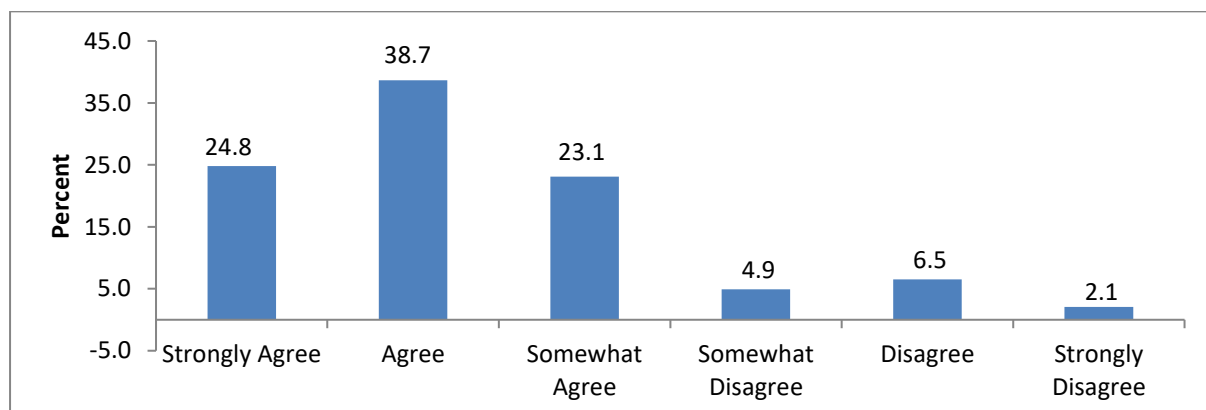
<sup>120</sup> See Appendix Figure D.5.5 for a breakdown by code, and Table D.5.4 for responses by playing level.

**FIGURE 6.23 'WORKING CONDITIONS OF PAID JOB NEED TO BE FLEXIBLE TO ENABLE ME TO PLAY INTER-COUNTY': 2016 PLAYERS**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

Sixty-four per cent agreed/strongly agreed that they have to watch their behaviour in public (Figure 6.24). Another 23 per cent of players somewhat agreed with this, giving a total of 87 per cent indicating that they had to watch their behaviour in public. This percentage was higher among the top tier football (Division 1 and 2) and hurling (MacCarthy Cup) teams (see Appendix Table D.5.5).<sup>121</sup>

**FIGURE 6.24 'I HAVE TO WATCH MY BEHAVIOUR IN PUBLIC': 2016 PLAYERS**

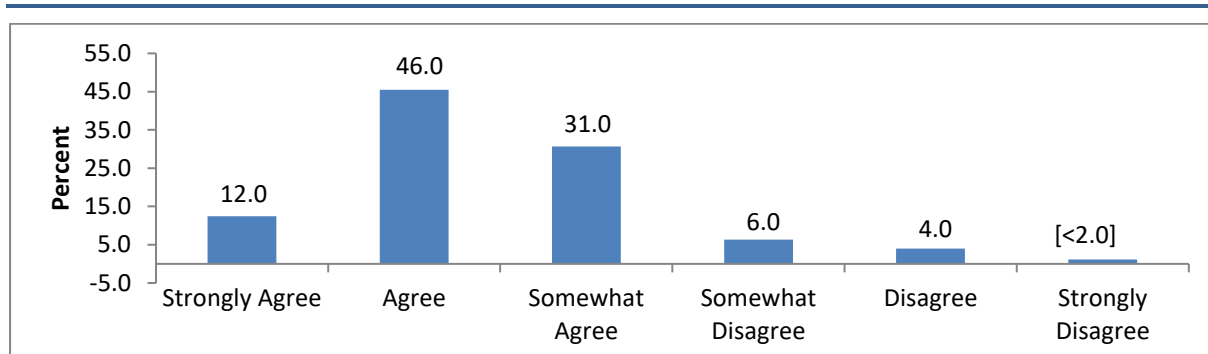
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Fifty-eight per cent of players agreed/strongly agreed that 'I enjoy taking part in voluntary activities that promote Gaelic games' (Figure 6.25). Another 31 per cent somewhat agreed, with only a small proportion (11 per cent) somewhat disagreeing/disagreeing/strongly disagreeing with this voluntary aspect of playing

<sup>121</sup> See Appendix Figure D.5.6 for a breakdown by code.

Gaelic games.<sup>122</sup>

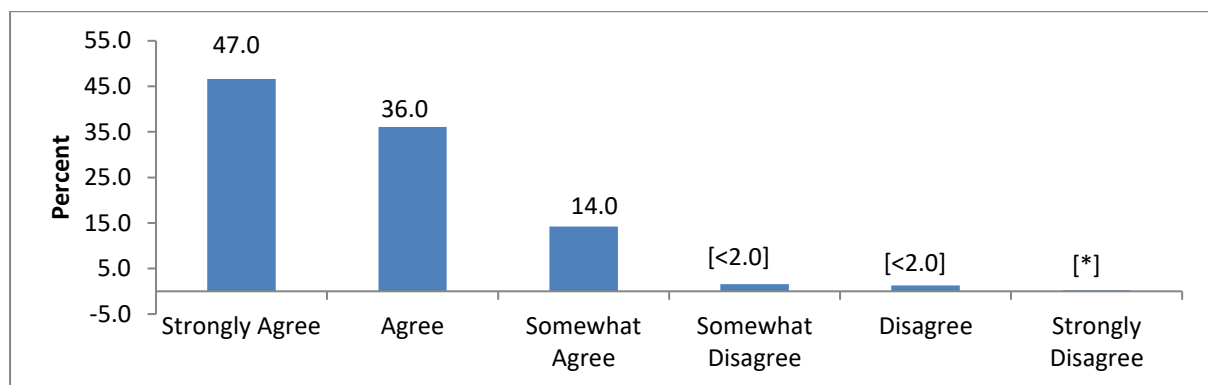
**FIGURE 6.25 'I ENJOY TAKING PART IN VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES THAT PROMOTE GAELIC GAMES': 2016 PLAYERS**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).  
 Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

Eighty-three per cent of players agreed/strongly agreed that they were glad that they made the choice to play inter-county (Figure 6.26). Another 14 per cent somewhat agreed, with only a very small proportion somewhat disagreeing/disagreeing/strongly disagreeing (3 per cent).<sup>123</sup>

**FIGURE 6.26 'I AM GLAD I MADE THE CHOICE TO PLAY INTER-COUNTY': 2016 PLAYERS**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).  
 Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.  
 [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

## 6.6 BENEFITS OF BECOMING AN INTER-COUNTY PLAYER

Players were asked if they thought that becoming an inter-county player from a club player only had benefited them in their life, specifically in terms of: (i)

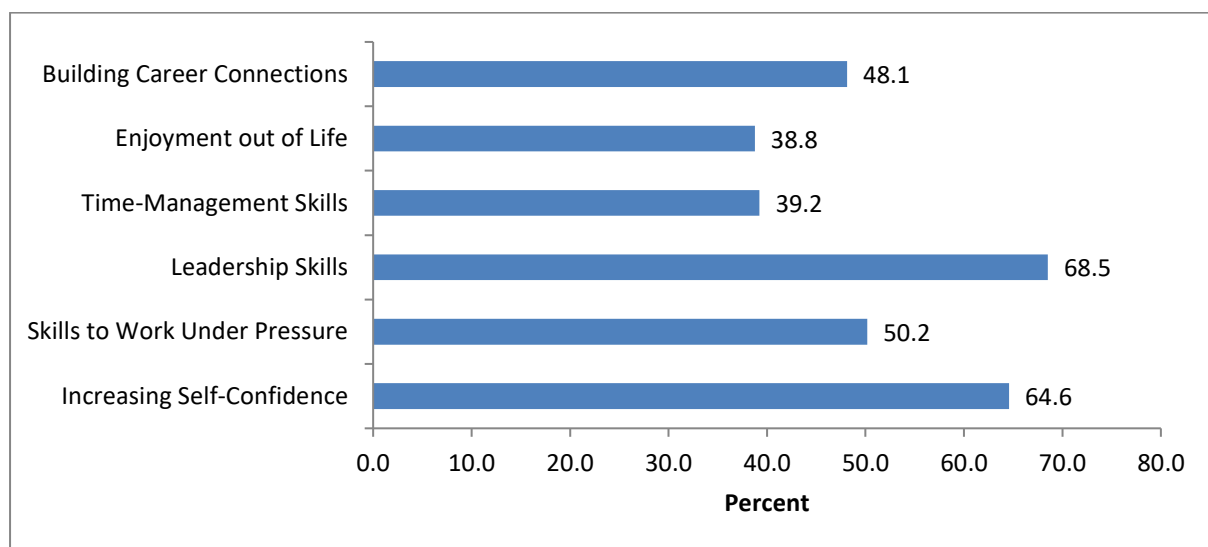
<sup>122</sup> See Appendix Figure D.5.7 for a breakdown by code, and Table D.5.6 for responses by playing level.

<sup>123</sup> See Appendix Figure D.5.8 for a breakdown by code, and Table D.5.7 for responses by playing level.

increasing self-confidence, (ii) developing skills to work under pressure, (iii) leadership skills, (iv) time-management skills, (v) getting enjoyment out of life, (vi) building connections to help in their professional career, and (vii) other (please specify).<sup>124</sup>

Overall, 69 per cent felt that the development of leadership skills was one of the main benefits that they had experienced as a result of making the transition from a club to an inter-county player (Figure 6.27). This was followed by an increase in self-confidence (65 per cent), the development of skills to work under pressure (50 per cent) and building connections that would help players in their professional career (48 per cent).<sup>125</sup>

**FIGURE 6.27 BENEFITS OF BECOMING AN INTER-COUNTY PLAYER FROM A CLUB PLAYER ONLY: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL**



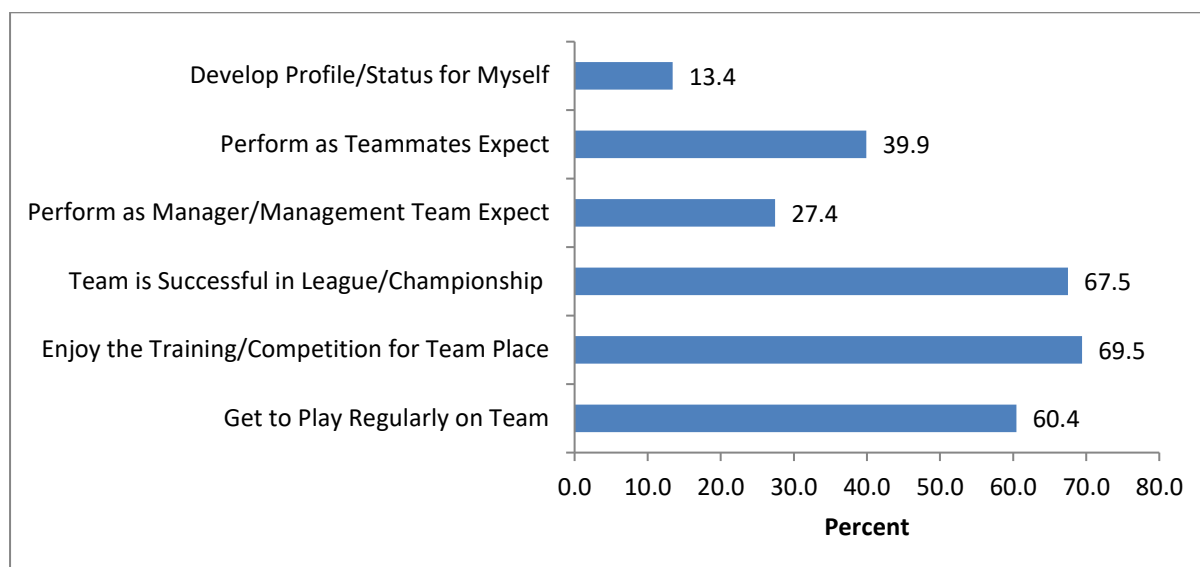
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

## 6.7 Most important aspects of inter-county experience

When players were asked to identify the three most important aspects of their inter-county experience, (i) the enjoyment that they got from training and competition for a place on the team (70 per cent), (ii) being successful in the national league and/or championship (68 per cent) and (iii) getting to play regularly on the team (60 per cent) were selected as the top three factors (Figure 6.28).

<sup>124</sup> Players were asked to select all that applied.

<sup>125</sup> For a breakdown by code, playing level and age, see Appendix Figures D.6.1–D.6.4.

**FIGURE 6.28 THREE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF INTER-COUNTY EXPERIENCE: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

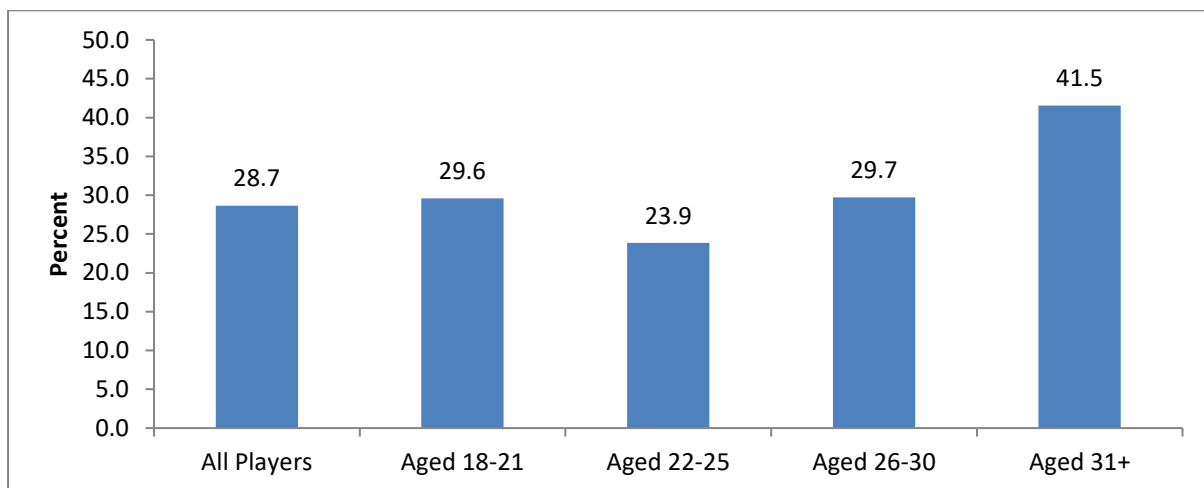
Performing as their teammates expected was also an important factor for players (40 per cent), much more so than performing as their manager/management team expected (27 per cent). Developing a profile for themselves was not an important aspect of their inter-county experience (Figure 6.28).<sup>126</sup>

## 6.8 DROP-OUT FROM SENIOR INTER-COUNTY

Almost 30 per cent of players did not continue to play senior inter-county in 2017 (Figure 6.29).<sup>127</sup> Not surprising, a bigger proportion of those aged over 30 stopped playing at the end of the 2016 season – 42 per cent.

<sup>126</sup> See Appendix Figures D.7.1 to D.7.4 for a breakdown by code, playing level and age.

<sup>127</sup> For a breakdown by playing level, see Appendix Figures D.8.1 and D.8.2.

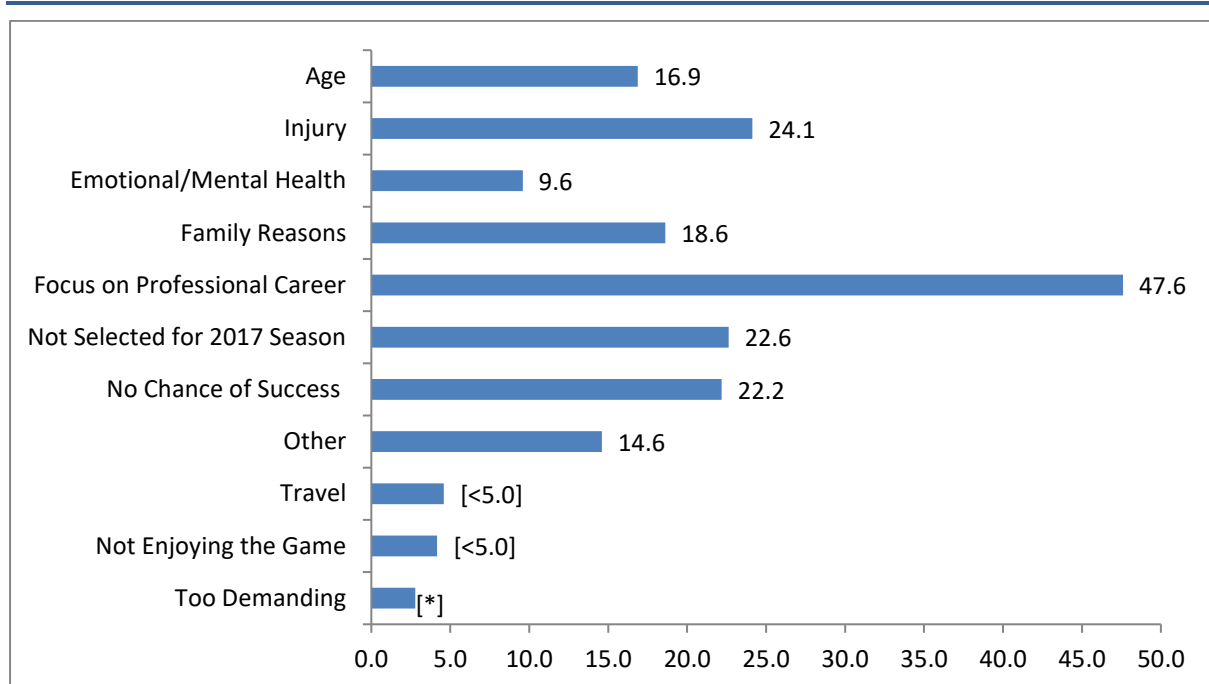
**FIGURE 6.29 2016 PLAYERS NO LONGER PLAYING SENIOR INTER-COUNTY IN 2017: AGE GROUP**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Players who indicated that they did not continue to play (29 per cent) were asked to identify, from the following eight options, their three main reasons for withdrawing from the game: (i) age, (ii) retired because of injury, (iii) retired for emotional or mental health reasons, (iv) retired for family reasons, (v) wanted to focus on professional career (paid work/study), (vi) not selected by the county management team for the 2017 season, (vii) did not feel that there was a chance of success with the county team, and (viii) other (please specify). When we examined the reasons selected by the players, 'other' was one of the top categories chosen. Given this, we went through the responses and created three additional categories, based on the information that the players provided: (i) going travelling, (ii) not enjoying the game anymore, and (iii) game too demanding.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, over the past few years there has been growing concern that senior inter-county players are no longer enjoying the game because of the commitments required to play at that level. If this is the case, one might expect players to cease playing. However, for the 2016 players who stepped away from the game at the end of that season, a lack of enjoyment was not one of their main reasons for doing so. The main reason why these players withdrew was that they wanted to focus on their professional career. Specifically, 48 per cent selected this as one of their three main reasons for no longer playing in 2017 (Figure 6.30).



**FIGURE 6.30 MAIN REASONS WHY 2016 PLAYERS CEASED PLAYING SENIOR INTER-COUNTY IN 2017: OVERALL (PER CENT)**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution. [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

Injury was the next key driver for players retiring (24 per cent). This was followed by players not being selected by the county management team for the 2017 season (23 per cent) and feeling that they did not have a chance of success with their county team (22 per cent). Family (19 per cent) and age (17 per cent) were two other important factors in players' decision to step away from the inter-county game.<sup>128</sup>

In relation to not enjoying the game, less than 5 per cent of players identified this as one of their three main reasons for ceasing to play; while the proportion who indicated that the game was too demanding as a reason for withdrawing was very small, such that the percentage is not reliable.

Regardless of a player's age,<sup>129</sup> the main reason why they ceased playing was that they wanted to focus on their professional career (Figure 6.31).

Players aged 18 to 21 are at a critical juncture in their lives when they are

<sup>128</sup> For a breakdown by code, see Appendix Figure D.8.3.

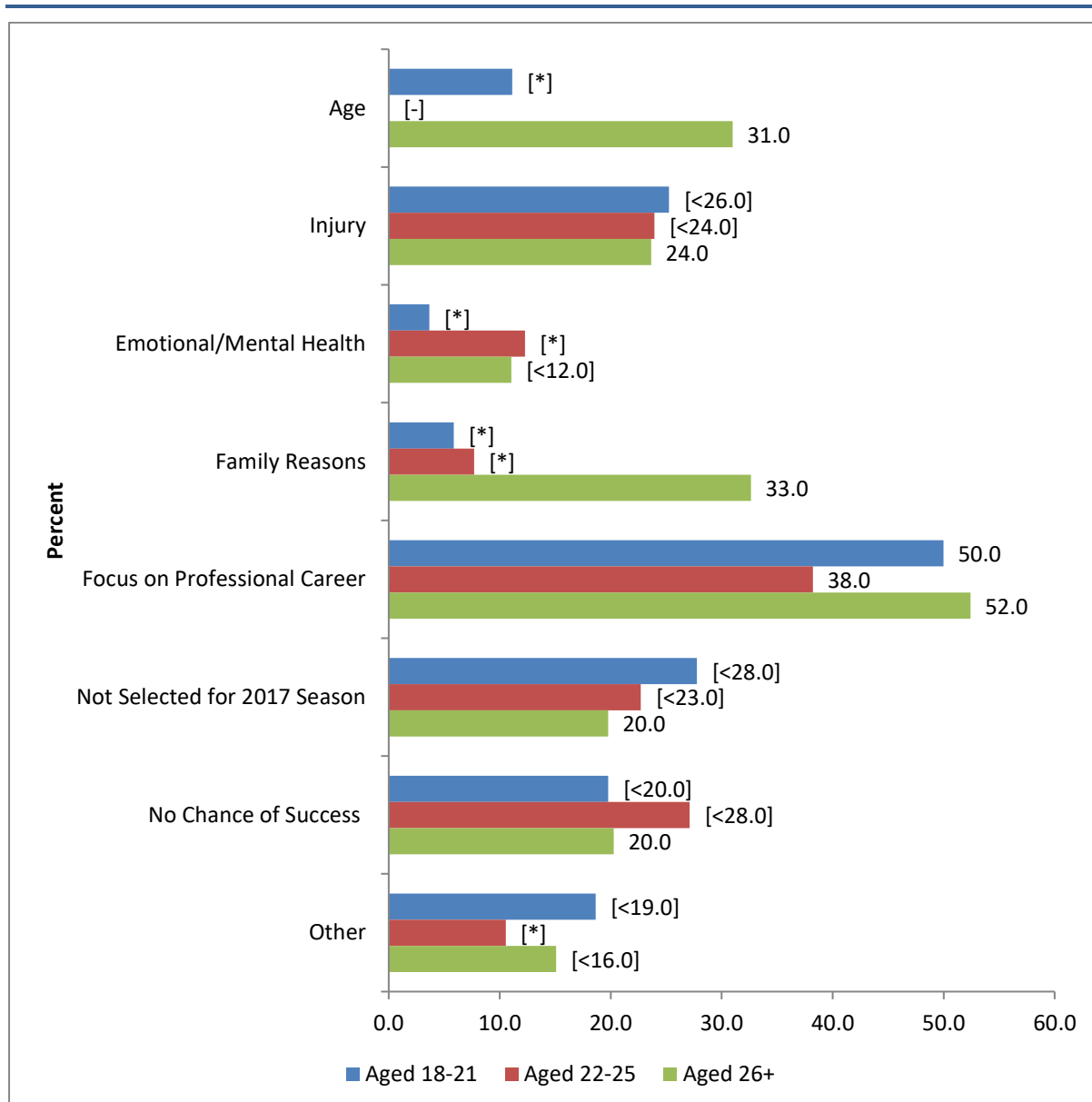
<sup>129</sup> The sample size for 2016 senior inter-county players 'aged 31+' who were no longer playing in 2017 was too small to produce reliable estimates. Thus, the analysis for the older age cohort is based on those aged '26 and above'.

transitioning from second-level school into either third-level education or the labour market. It therefore should not be too surprising that some players in this age bracket took the decision to prioritise their professional career path over their continued involvement in senior inter-county for the 2017 season.

For the older age groups, it would appear that some of these players decided that their job was now an area of their life that they wanted to prioritise. Some of the findings presented earlier in this chapter would support this hypothesis: for example, players wanting to spend more time on their professional career but being unable to do so because of their inter-county commitments; and over a third of players identifying their professional career as being affected negatively from playing senior inter-county.

Family was the next main reason why some players aged over 26 ceased playing in 2017. Again, some of the earlier analyses in this chapter, and in Chapter 5, support this result. For example, the main downside identified by players from playing senior inter-county was getting to spend less time with their family/partner/friends.

**FIGURE 6.31 MAIN REASONS WHY 2016 PLAYERS CEASED PLAYING SENIOR INTER-COUNTY IN 2017: AGE GROUP**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).  
 Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution. [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable. [-] No responses.

Overall, the finding that very few players cited the game as being too demanding as a reason for ceasing playing seems paradoxical, given: (i) the high levels of time commitment required to play senior inter-county that were documented in Chapter 5, (ii) the time commitments involved in playing senior inter-county being cited by players as the second main downside of playing at this level (Section 6.5.2), (iii) 82 per cent of players indicating that too much effort was being demanded of them (Section 6.5.3), and (iv) the other inter-county commitment issues identified by players that were highlighted in this chapter (less time with family, partner, friends; unable to devote more time to professional career; playing with

club/college team; etc.). However, we do know from this chapter as well that 83 per cent of players were glad that they made the choice to play senior inter-county (Section 6.5.3). Thus, further research is needed to identify why players play senior inter-county in spite of the commitments required and, therefore, to decipher why the game being 'too demanding' is not a bigger factor in explaining why players cease playing at this level.

## CHAPTER 7

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### Effects of playing senior inter-county on players' club involvement

#### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

Most senior inter-county players commence playing Gaelic games with their local GAA club,<sup>130</sup> or, at least, this is where they get identified for selection to play at inter-county level. For some, their inter-county career commences at the under-age level,<sup>131</sup> while others make the breakthrough when they start playing at the senior level within their club.<sup>132</sup> Thus, clubs are the nursery grounds for inter-county players, without which there would be no inter-county teams.

Playing senior inter-county has an impact on players' club involvement in addition to (as was seen in Chapter 6) other components of their lives. Some of these effects, along with other aspects of playing club football/hurling, have been identified earlier in the report. Examples include the percentage of players that played/trained with their club during the inter-county championship (Section 5.2.3), the proportion that played/trained with their club when injured (Section 6.3), etc.

In this chapter, we examine players' views on a number of other matters related to playing both inter-county and club football/hurling. How players felt about the amount of time that they got to spend with both teams during the 2016 season is looked at as well. We also examine whether players would want to spend more time with their club if it was at a cost to their personal inter-county career success.

#### 7.2 PLAYERS' EXPERIENCES OF PLAYING BOTH INTER-COUNTY AND CLUB

Eighty-eight per cent of players agreed/strongly agreed that their club team played a big role in their development as a Gaelic player, with another 8 per cent somewhat agreeing with this (Figure 7.1).<sup>133</sup>

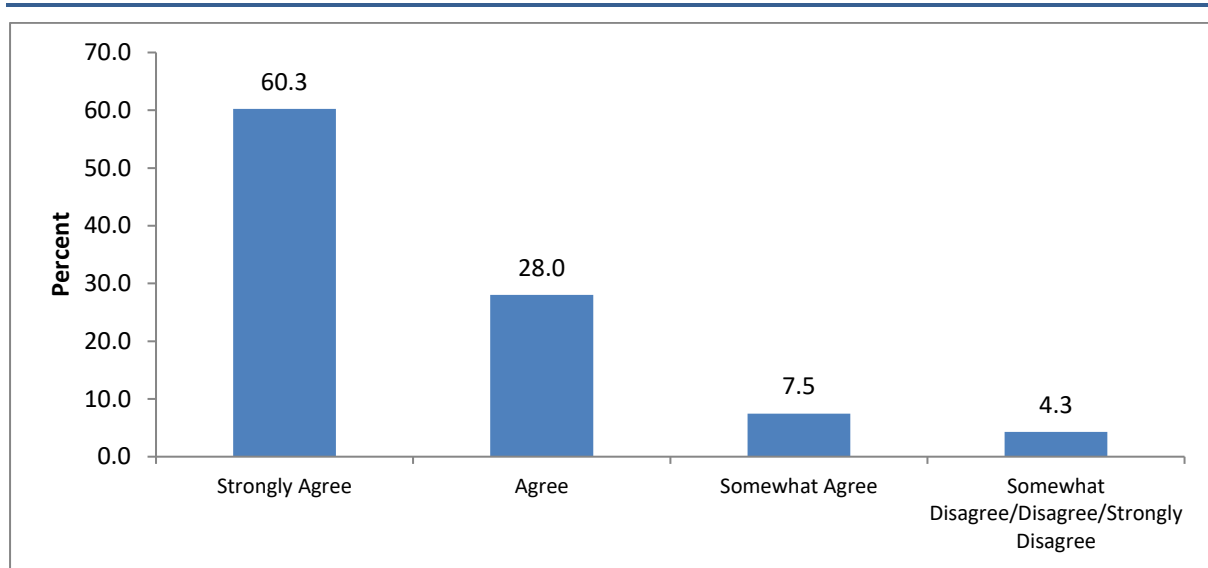
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<sup>130</sup> Some are introduced to Gaelic games through their primary schools; others through family and/or friends.

<sup>131</sup> Players might commence playing with their county U14 team, or U16, minor or U21.

<sup>132</sup> 'Senior' here relates to the main adult team within a senior inter-county player's club, which could be junior, intermediate or senior (see Chapter 2).

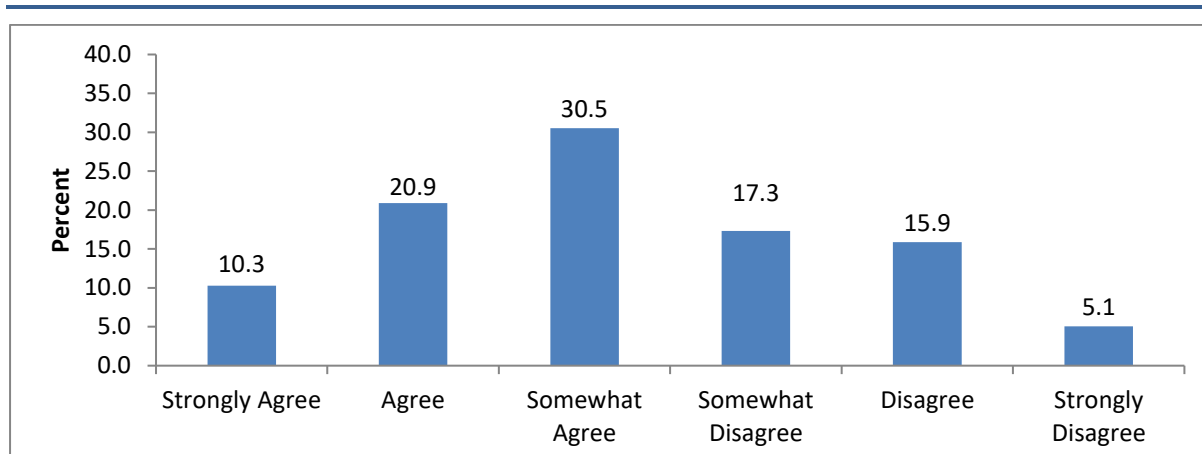
<sup>133</sup> For a breakdown by code and playing level, see Appendix Figures E.1.1–E.1.3.

**FIGURE 7.1 'PLAYING FOR MY CLUB TEAM HAS PLAYED A BIG ROLE IN MY DEVELOPMENT AS A GAELIC PLAYER': 2016 PLAYERS**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

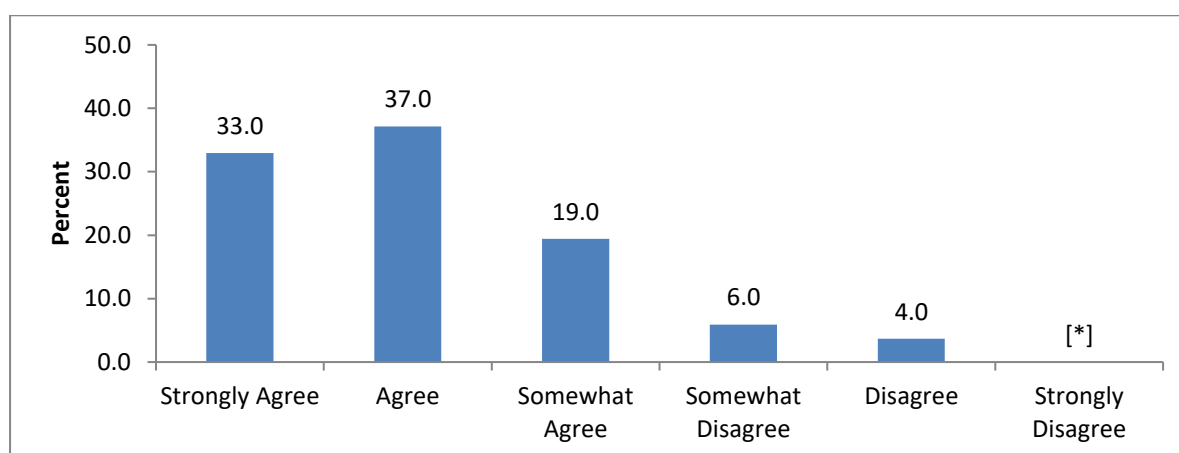
Almost a third (31 per cent) of players agreed/strongly agreed that 'my club manager and management team expect too much from me when I return from inter-county duties to play with my club' (Figure 7.2). Nearly another third (31 per cent) somewhat agreed with this, with the remaining 38 per cent disagreeing.<sup>134</sup> The finding in Chapter 6 that almost 50 per cent of players played a club match when injured, compared to 36 per cent playing an inter-county match, may help to explain why 62 per cent of players feel that too much is expected of them when they return to play with their club.

<sup>134</sup> For a breakdown by code and playing level, see Appendix Table E.1.1.

**FIGURE 7.2 'MY CLUB MANAGER AND MANAGEMENT TEAM EXPECT TOO MUCH FROM ME WHEN I RETURN FROM INTER-COUNTY DUTIES TO PLAY WITH MY CLUB': 2016 PLAYERS**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Seventy per cent of players agreed/strongly agreed that their club is proud that they represent the club on the county team (Figure 7.3). Another 20 per cent somewhat agreed with this, with only 10 per cent disagreeing.<sup>135</sup>

**FIGURE 7.3 'MY CLUB IS PROUD THAT I REPRESENT THE CLUB ON THE COUNTY TEAM': 2016 PLAYERS**

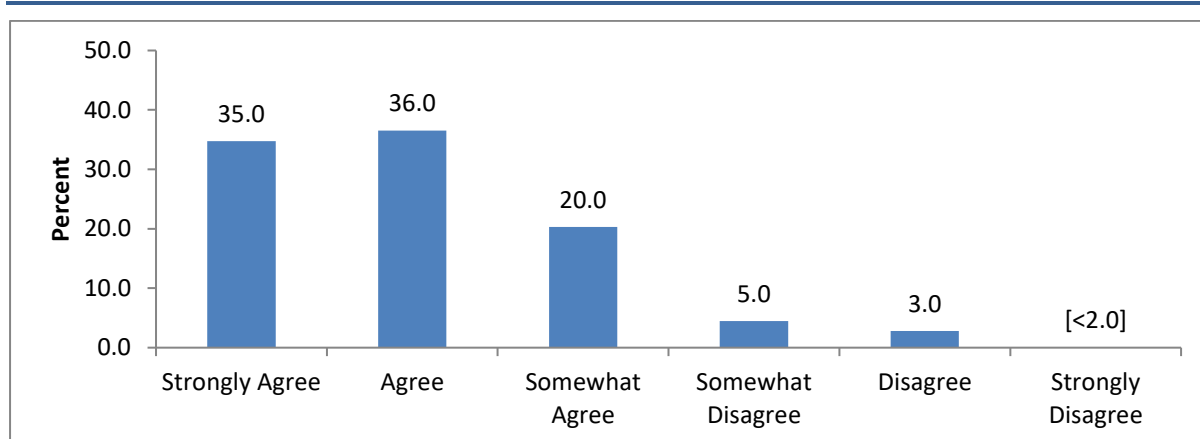
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

Seventy-one per cent of players agreed/strongly agreed that their inter-county commitments prevent them from socialising with their club teammates (Figure 7.4). Another 20 per cent somewhat agreed; less than 10 per cent disagreed.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>135</sup> For a breakdown by code and playing level, see Appendix Table E.1.3.

<sup>136</sup> For a breakdown by code and playing level, see Appendix Table E.1.4.

**FIGURE 7.4 'MY INTER-COUNTY COMMITMENTS PREVENT ME FROM SOCIALISING WITH MY CLUB TEAMMATES': 2016 PLAYERS**

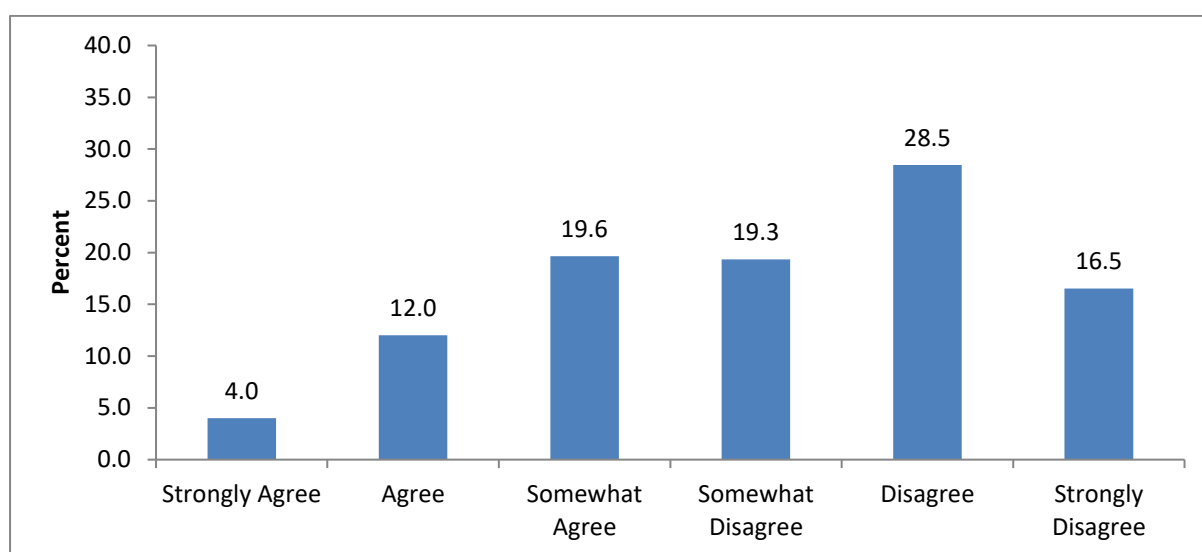
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

This inability of county players to socialise with their club teammates could affect relationships between these players too. When we examined this issue we found that while 45 per cent of players disagreed/strongly disagreed with the view that 'my club teammates are resentful towards me when I return to play for the club after inter-county duties' (Figure 7.5), 36 per cent felt that, to some extent, their teammates were resentful towards them when they returned to play with their club.<sup>137</sup> Based on the international research presented in Chapter 3, socialising with friends is important for players' overall well-being and their sport performance too.

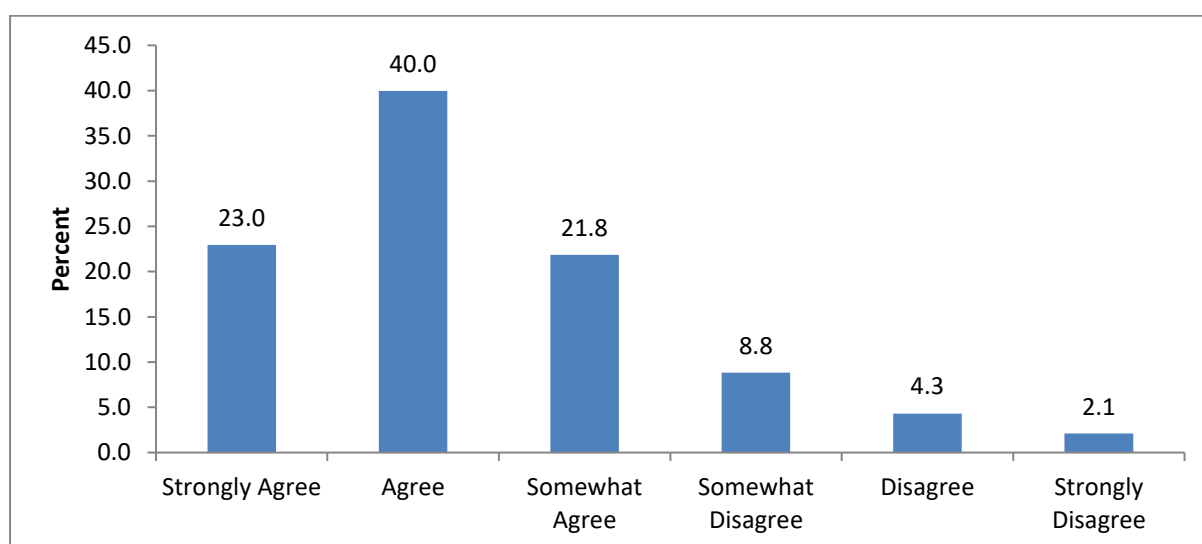
<sup>137</sup> For a breakdown by code and playing level, see Appendix Table E.1.2.



**FIGURE 7.5 'MY CLUB TEAMMATES ARE RESENTFUL TOWARDS ME WHEN I RETURN TO PLAY FOR THE CLUB AFTER INTER-COUNTY DUTIES': 2016 PLAYERS**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Sixty-three per cent of players agreed/strongly agreed that 'my club management team is understanding when my inter-county commitments restrict me from participating in club training/matches' (Figure 7.6).<sup>138</sup>

**FIGURE 7.6 'MY CLUB MANAGEMENT TEAM IS UNDERSTANDING WHEN MY INTER-COUNTY COMMITMENTS RESTRICT ME FROM PARTICIPATING IN CLUB TRAINING/MATCHES': 2016 PLAYERS**

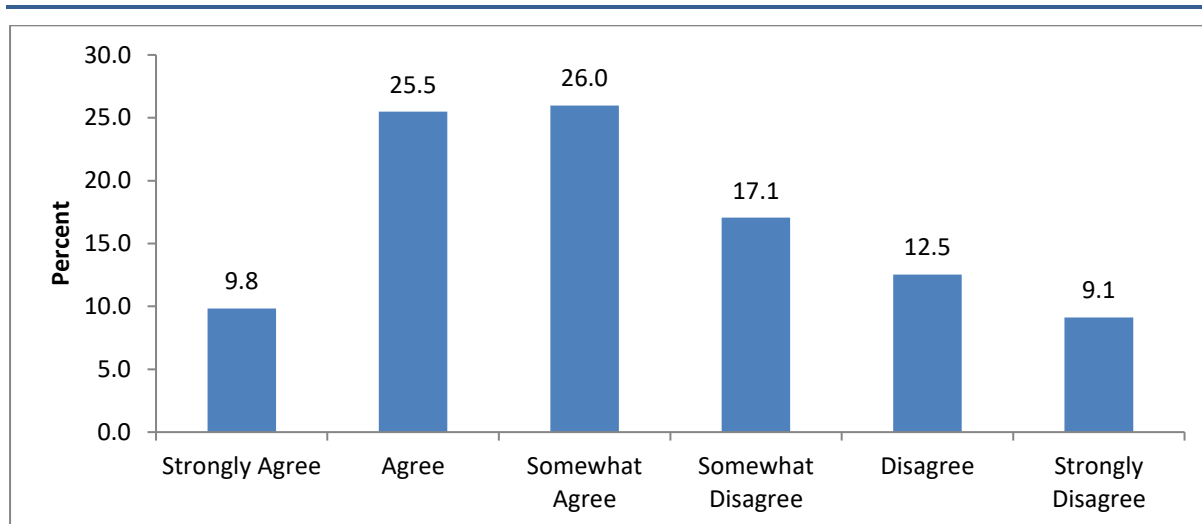
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Just over a third (35 per cent) of players agreed/strongly agreed that there was a

<sup>138</sup> For a breakdown by code and playing level, see Appendix Table E.1.5.

respectful understanding, and good communication, between their club and county management teams regarding their availability to participate for both teams (Figure 7.7). Another 26 per cent somewhat agreed with this, while almost 40 per cent did not believe that this was the case.<sup>139</sup>

**FIGURE 7.7 'THERE IS A RESPECTFUL UNDERSTANDING, AND GOOD COMMUNICATION, BETWEEN MY CLUB AND COUNTY MANAGEMENT TEAMS REGARDING MY AVAILABILITY TO PARTICIPATE FOR BOTH TEAMS': 2016 PLAYERS**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

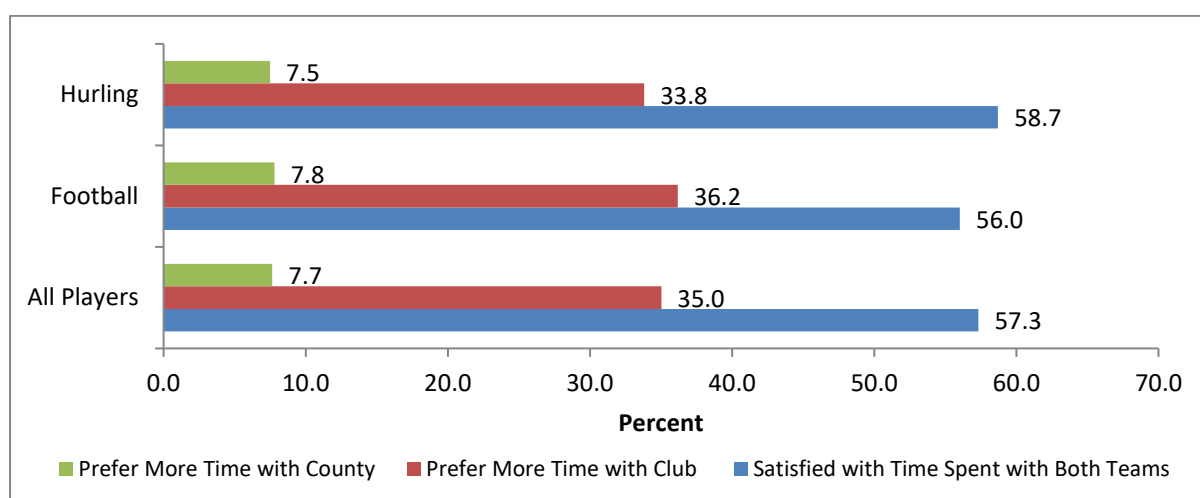
These latter findings may indicate a lack of engagement between county and club managers and management teams, which is not necessarily in the best interest of players.

### 7.3 PLAYERS' VIEWS ON AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WITH CLUB AND COUNTY TEAMS DURING 2016 SEASON

Fifty-seven per cent of players said that they were satisfied with the amount of time that they got to spend with both their club and county teams during the pre-season (Figure 7.8). However, 35 per cent indicated that they would prefer to spend more time with their club and less with the county during this playing period.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>139</sup> For a breakdown by code and playing level, see Appendix Table E.1.6.

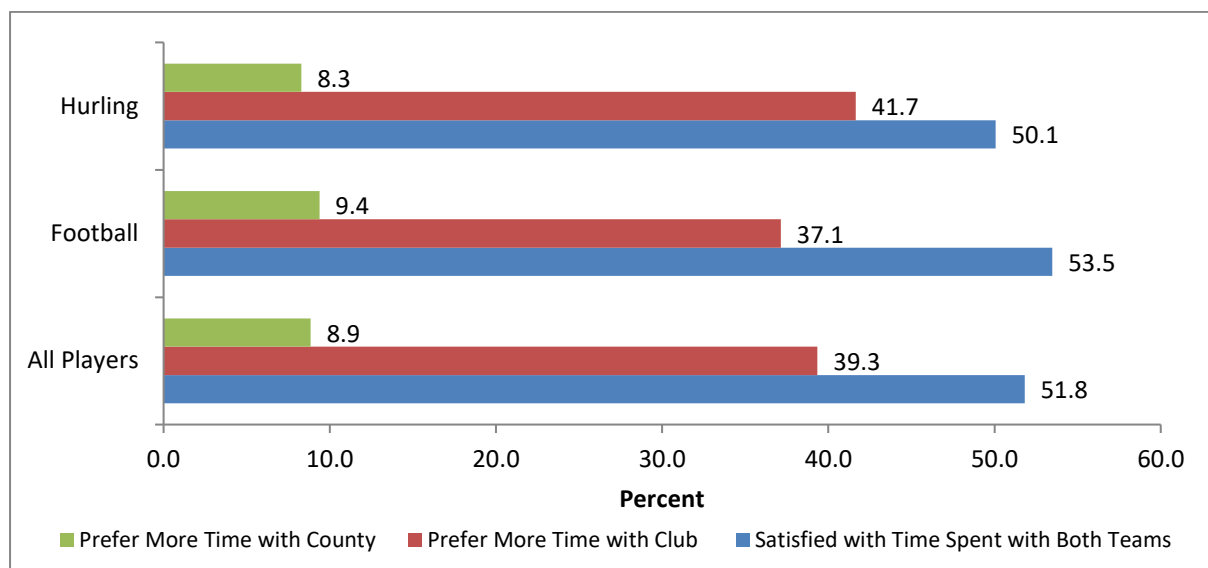
<sup>140</sup> See Appendix Figures E.2.1 and E.2.2 for a breakdown by playing level.

**FIGURE 7.8 PLAYERS' VIEW ON AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WITH CLUB AND COUNTY TEAMS DURING THE PRE-SEASON: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND CODE**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Over half (52 per cent) of players were satisfied with the amount of time that they got to spend with both their club and county teams during the national league (Figure 7.9). This is slightly less than for the pre-season (57 per cent), with the percentage who would prefer to spend more time with their club during the national league being marginally greater (39 per cent compared to 35 per cent for the pre-season).<sup>141</sup>

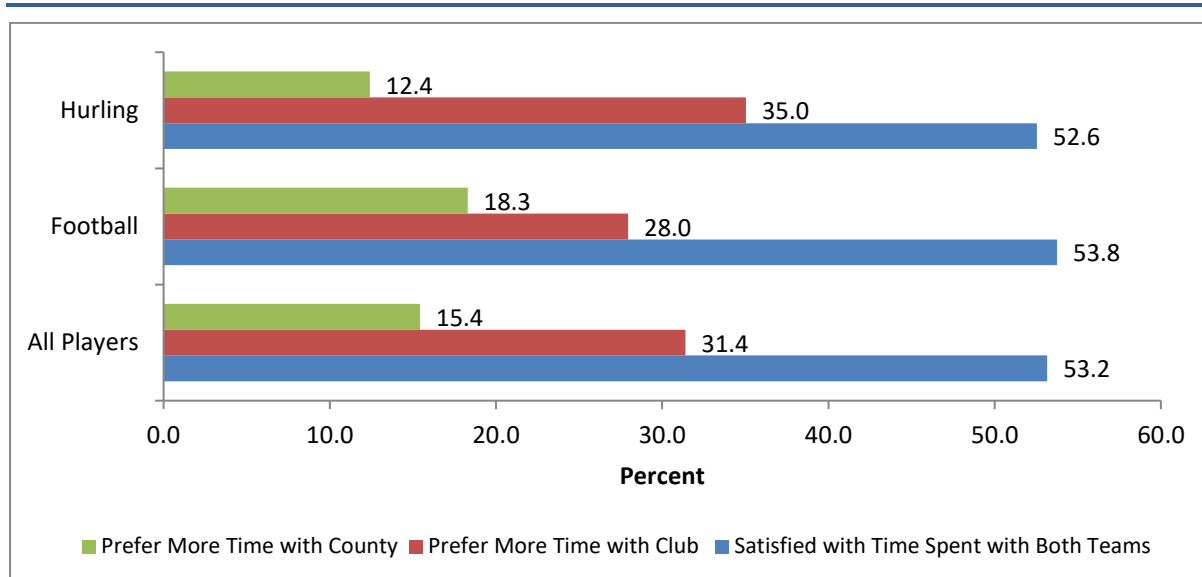
<sup>141</sup> See Appendix Figures E.2.3 and E.2.4 for a breakdown by playing level.

**FIGURE 7.9 PLAYERS' VIEW ON AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WITH CLUB AND COUNTY TEAMS DURING THE NATIONAL LEAGUE: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND CODE**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Almost identical proportions of players were satisfied with the amount of time that they got to spend with both their club and county teams during the championship as for the national league: 53 and 52 per cent respectively (Figure 7.10). However, the percentage that wanted to spend more time with their club and less with the county during the championship was slightly less – 31 per cent compared to 39 per cent during the national league.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>142</sup> See Appendix Figures E.2.5 and E.2.6 for a breakdown by playing level.

**FIGURE 7.10 PLAYERS' VIEW ON AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WITH CLUB AND COUNTY TEAMS DURING THE CHAMPIONSHIP: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND CODE**

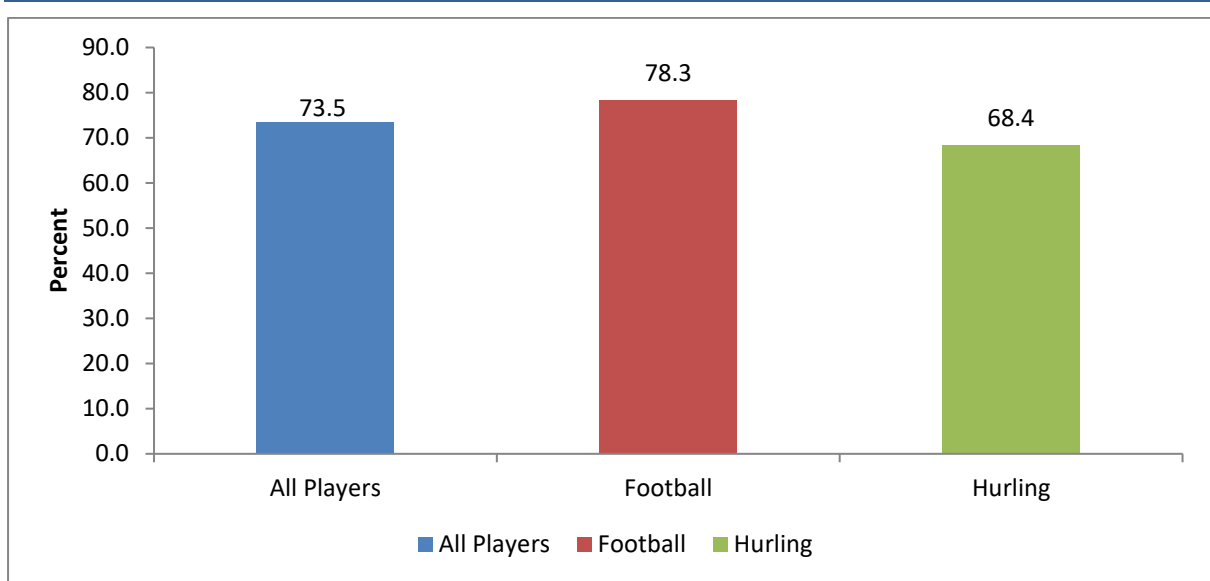
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

#### 7.4 PLAYERS' VIEWS ON SPENDING MORE TIME WITH THEIR CLUB

When players were asked if they would want to spend more time with their club if it was at a cost to their personal inter-county career success, 74 per cent said no (Figure 7.11). This percentage was greater among footballers: 78 per cent compared to 68 per cent of hurlers.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>143</sup> See Appendix Figures E.2.7 and E.2.8 for a breakdown by playing level.

**FIGURE 7.11 NOT WILLING TO SPEND MORE TIME WITH CLUB IF AT A COST TO PLAYERS' PERSONAL INTER-COUNTY SUCCESS: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND CODE**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

## CHAPTER 8

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### Main research findings and implications for senior inter-county players' welfare

#### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

Players are central to the continuance of hurling and Gaelic football, as is true of players for any team sport. Thus, the welfare of players is of paramount importance to the protection and growth of Gaelic games. The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and the Gaelic Players Association (GPA) have introduced a number of measures over the past decade and a half to ensure that players' needs are met, and that those who play Gaelic games enjoy their experience. Nevertheless, questions continue to be raised about the demands that today's games are placing on senior inter-county players and the knock-on effects on their lives and club involvement. The GAA and GPA jointly commissioned the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) in January 2017 to conduct an independent examination of these issues.

The research was primarily conducted using two complementary research strands: (i) senior inter-county player workshops and (ii) a survey of 2016 players. Four provincial workshops were conducted with a random selection of 2016 players in the spring of 2017. These were undertaken in order to ascertain players' views on the commitments required to play senior inter-county and the effects of these on their personal and professional lives and club involvement. The information gathered at these workshops was then used to develop a questionnaire that was administered to all 2016 players in the summer/autumn of 2017. This was undertaken with the intention of gathering the data required from players that would allow us to address the objectives of this research, as set out in Chapter 1. Thus, the research presented in this report has been, for the most part, driven by the players themselves. Workshops were also conducted with 2016 senior inter-county managers, County Board Secretaries and third-level Games Development Officers (GDOs) in order to acquire their insights and views on player welfare among senior inter-county players.

The findings from the research are numerous and wide-ranging. The purpose of this section is to take a broader look at some of the principal issues arising from the study, to consider their implications for player welfare and policy in this area, and to suggest follow-up work where appropriate.

## **8.2 FINDINGS AND PLAYER WELFARE IMPLICATIONS**

### **8.2.1 Time commitments**

It is obvious from the results that players are devoting a very significant portion of their time to their senior inter-county activities. For instance, during an average 2016 championship (late May/June) week (i.e. Monday to Friday), they allocated just over 6 hours on a pitch-based training day to their inter-county commitments. For those resident outside their home county – almost a quarter of 2016 players – this was just short of 7 hours. To put these figures in context, the average working day among males in Ireland is 7.9 hours. In fact, this is the amount of time that players allocated to their professional commitments on a pitch-based training day. Thus, their inter-county commitments on these days were almost equivalent to undertaking a second consecutive shift of work.

For sports conditioning training days, the average time allocation during the championship varied between 4.4 hours (match week) and 5.4 hours (non-match week) – again, the time allocation was higher for players resident outside their home county. The average number of training sessions (pitch and sports conditioning) that players attended was 3.9 the week of a game and 4.9 during a non-match week. On top of this, 72 per cent of players undertook individually instigated training sessions during championship match weeks. This rose to 83 per cent for weeks when there was no game. For this group of players, their average inter-county time commitment the week of a game (excluding match day) was 23.5 hours, rising to almost 31 hours during weeks in which there was no match.

It is important to note that the time allocation estimates presented in the report focus on the substantive time duties of players (duration of pitch-based and sports conditioning sessions, travel, etc.) as it was not feasible to include an exhaustive list of each inter-county duty that players allocate time to in the survey that they completed (time spent completing daily monitoring diaries, visualisation, mindfulness, recovery time, etc.). Thus, the estimates presented are baseline measures of players' inter-county time commitments.

### **8.2.2 Sports conditioning**

One of the main factors in the amount of time required of players over recent years has undoubtedly being the emergence of sports conditioning as a major component of inter-county training. 2016 players engaged in an average of 1.5 such sessions during a championship match week, increasing to 2 sessions during weeks when there was no game. Time-wise, 1.6 hours (35 per cent) was spent on a conditioning session during a match week, rising to 2 hours (40 per cent) in a non-match week. In addition to conditioning, travel to and from such sessions (as with pitch-based sessions) is another major time commitment issue for players: for



every session, this averaged 1.8 hours for 2016 players.

The association between strength training and sports performance has been well documented (McGuigan et al., 2012). In addition, such training can help guard against injury (Gamble, 2012), once it is tailored to the sport to which it is being applied and, as with any type of training, the training load is appropriately graded and individually monitored (Young, 2006; Orchard, 2012; Gabbett, 2016). Nevertheless, it has to be acknowledged that the sports conditioning time commitments of inter-county players are adding substantially to their overall training load. Thus, this needs to be considered in the design of any policies aimed at preventing injury and/or burnout.

### **8.2.3 Travel**

The time taken to travel to and from training sessions, both pitch-based and sports conditioning, is another issue that needs attention. Combined, this averaged 2 hours per session for 2016 players. Not surprising, it was greater for players resident outside of their home counties (2.7 hours). Given the volume of travel that players engage in on a weekly basis for training and/or games, one could envisage this increasing their risk of injury and/or resulting in suboptimal performance, either directly or indirectly through reduced sleep and recovery. Thus, county management teams need to be cognisant of this issue when formulating training regimes.

One area that could be examined in this regard is the location of sports conditioning sessions. Most 2016 players resident within their home county, and quite a proportion resident away, commuted to their county-team bases for these sessions. In fact, the time taken to travel to and from such trainings was at least the same, and in some cases greater, than the duration of the sessions. Ideally, these trainings would take place in a collective team setting. However, from the perspective of player welfare and the overall performance capabilities of the team, consideration should be given to putting systems in place that will facilitate players to undertake sports conditioning sessions at locations nearer to their place of residence (e.g. monitored individual or mini-group sessions).

### **8.2.4 Personal relationships and general downtime**

The results from the study highlight the fact that players tend to ring-fence their time allocation to senior inter-county activities by compromising on other aspects of their lives: in particular, personal relationships (i.e. time with family, partner, friends) and general downtime. 2016 players devoted a mere 2.4 hours to such activities on a pitch-based training day during the championship. In fact, the majority (61 per cent) spent two hours or less, with this sacrifice greater among players aged over 30. Other findings from the research indicate that such

compromises to play senior inter-county are not sustainable in the long run. Also, from a work–life balance perspective it has been shown that these types of trade-offs are not good for an athlete's overall well-being or sports career (e.g. McKenzie et al., 2003).

### **8.2.5 Sleep**

The findings indicate that sleep is being compromised. Almost half of 2016 players (48 per cent) did not get the 8 to 10 hours' sleep that is recommended for athletes on pitch-based training days during the championship. This was 63.4 per cent among those resident outside their home county. As well as sleep being a key component of athletes' training, performance and recovery (Marshall and Turner, 2016; Fullagar et al., 2015; Bird, 2013), there is research on the relationship between reduced sleep and athletes' risk of injury and poor health (Taylor et al., 2016; Copenhaver and Diamond, 2017). Descriptively, we found that the injury rate was somewhat higher among players who got 7 hours' sleep or less (57 per cent).

The research suggests that low sleep levels and/or quality may be affecting players' mental well-being as well. The study also points towards players lacking awareness of the importance of sleep for recovery, performance and overall well-being. Overall, these findings indicate the need for greater understanding and education on the importance of sleep among inter-county teams, both players and management.

In general, county management teams and players need to be aware that off-pitch preparation in the form of sleep and travel is as important to players' performance and overall well-being as on-pitch and sports conditioning sessions.

### **8.2.6 Professional commitments**

At first glance, it appears that players are managing to maintain their professional careers in tandem with playing senior inter-county. On average, 2016 players devoted 7.9 hours to their professional commitments on a pitch-based training day during the championship, which is in line with the average time spent by the general male population in work. In fact, almost 50 per cent allocated between 8 and 10 hours, with another 24 per cent spending over 10 hours. This latter percentage was larger among players aged over 30 (39 per cent), and yet these players did not allocate any less time to their inter-county duties. Also, although players resident outside their home county had to spend extra time travelling to and from their trainings, they managed to allocate the same amount of time to their professional careers as those resident within.

However, other findings from the study question the ability of players to maintain

this balance between their work and senior inter-county commitments over the medium to long term. For example, players aged over 30 managed to maintain the two only by cutting back on personal relationship and sleep time, while those resident outside their home counties kept the two going in tandem by devoting less time to their family/partner/friends/relaxing. In fact, the inter-county commitments of top-tier footballers appear to be impinging on some of these players' professional lives.

Also, the study showed that the main life area that players wanted to spend more time on, but could not because of their inter-county time commitments, was their professional career. Eventually, this seems to take precedence over playing inter-county, as the key reason why 2016 players ceased playing inter-county was that they wanted to focus on their professional careers. While this was particularly the case for older players, it applied across all age groups.

Finally, with 93 per cent of 2016 players indicating that the working conditions associated with their paid job need to be flexible to enable them to play inter-county, further in-depth examination is needed of the professional career decisions of these players, both the work and education/training elements. This is in order to determine if they are choosing careers and occupations that will facilitate them to give the time needed to play senior inter-county. The international research on burnout, work–life balance and athletic identity (Chapter 2) shows that such career decisions are not in athletes' long-term interests.

Overall, from a policy perspective, these time commitment findings raise questions with respect to the degree to which continuous increases in senior inter-county time commitments will impact on players' ability to balance various aspects of their lives, which could influence their decision whether to continue playing at the inter-county level.

### **8.2.7 Multiple Gaelic game team involvement**

The average time allocation figures outlined above mask substantial variation across some groups of players, particularly those aged 18 to 21. Their senior inter-county time commitments were, on average, the same as for older players. However, these young players had particularly high levels of overall Gaelic game time commitment during 2016 because the majority (68 per cent) played with four or more teams during the year.

Changes were made to the club and inter-county minor and U21 (football only) grades in 2017/2018 to address the issue of over-activity among this group, particularly in the February/March period when such players were involved with Higher Education (HE) and inter-county senior (national league) and U21 (football

only)<sup>144</sup> panels. The reforms that have been implemented mean that the U21 (now U20)<sup>145</sup> football games no longer clash with the HE and senior inter-county competitions in February/March.<sup>146</sup> However, the effectiveness of these reforms in preventing burnout among players aged 18 to 21 may be hampered as no modifications have been made to the HE competition structures. Thus, those who play senior inter-county (and are in HE) will continue to be involved with a minimum of one, but potentially up to four, college teams, along with their club's senior team(s) during the February/March period.

If it is not feasible for changes to be made to the timing of the HE competitions, then it is imperative that consideration be given by college and county management teams and, where needed, by club management teams as well, to collaborating in order to safeguard players' welfare and to keep each team in check from utilising the players for their own end goals. As a starting point, this cooperation could include the sharing of players' training load data and the elimination of sessions that overlap (e.g. sports conditioning).

### 8.2.8 Injuries

Just over half (52 per cent) of players sustained an injury while either training or playing with their senior inter-county team during the 2016 season. This figure was similar for hurlers and footballers. In terms of the impacts of these injuries on players' game involvement, just over 25 per cent were unable to play for a period of between 5 and 7 weeks, while a similar proportion had to opt out for a period of between 2 and 6 months.

It was evident from the study that a high proportion of players continued to train/play while injured. Specifically, 36 per cent of players indicated that they often/very often played an inter-county match when injured. The corresponding figure for club games was 50 per cent. Over half of those (54 per cent) who played an inter-county and/or club match when injured indicated that they had received medication to do so. This was particularly the case for Division 1 and 3 footballers for playing inter-county matches.

Injuries also impacted other aspects of respondents' lives. For instance, almost a third of players who sustained an injury during 2016 missed between 1 and 6 days of work/college. An important finding related to injury, and in particular an

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<sup>144</sup> The U21 inter-county hurling competition is played at the same time as the senior hurling championship in the summer (the U21 games on a Wednesday and the senior matches at the weekend).

<sup>145</sup> From 2019, hurling will also be regraded from U21 to U20.

<sup>146</sup> The competitions are now scheduled for later in the summer, with players who played with their senior inter-county team not permitted to play in the U20 competition.

individual's decision to play while injured, was that these decisions were ultimately taken by the players themselves and not at the behest of county management.

Although injury is seen as 'part of the game' (Chalmers, 2002: iv22), and most sports people have at some stage in their careers played/competed when injured, very little is known about injury at the community or amateur level (Chalmers, 2002). While some knowledge exists regarding senior inter-county players' injuries, through the National GAA Injury Surveillance Database and research that has been conducted using these or other Gaelic player data (e.g. Murphy et al., 2012; O'Connor et al., 2016), the nationally represented data that this study is based on shed light on some additional issues that warrant further investigation. Specifically, the relatively high incidence of players playing while injured is somewhat concerning and, from a policy perspective, more research is needed into establishing the long-term implications for players' welfare from such decisions. Also, given that the 'received medication to play' information relates to any stage over a player's senior inter-county career, it would be important to determine how frequently this happens: for example, the number of times in a year, and the average number of players per team that need medication to play per game. Finally, while we cannot demonstrate causality without further multivariate analysis,<sup>147</sup> the study found that players with lower levels of sleep per night had a higher incidence of injury (see 'Sleep' above). Given the international research on the relationship between injuries and sleep, this is another issue that warrants further investigation.

### 8.2.9 Well-being and mental health

The study sought to assess the mental health and well-being of inter-county players. 2016 players' levels of life satisfaction were in line with the general population. Their mental well-being was above the threshold level for being at risk of depression. However, it was lower than that of the population as a whole in Ireland and, in particular, for males and those of similar age.

As addressed earlier, one factor that may be contributing to this mental health finding is the amount of sleep that players are getting. Specifically, during the championship only 26 per cent of 2016 players indicated that they woke up feeling 'fresh and rested' most to all of the time. This percentage was lower among footballers (22 per cent).

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<sup>147</sup> This is an econometric technique that is used to isolate the individual impact of characteristics on an outcome of interest. In this instance, we would like to know the impact of sleep duration on a player's likelihood of getting injured, so we would use multivariate analysis to isolate the impact of this factor from the effect of other characteristics that might impact this likelihood (age, playing position, etc.).

Some other findings from the research point towards the commitments associated with inter-county participation potentially weighing on players' minds. Over half of 2016 players indicated that they felt that the time commitments involved in playing senior inter-county were too much. In fact, 82 per cent agreed to some extent that too much effort was demanded of them. Another 87 per cent indicated that they had to watch their behaviour in public, while 77 per cent said that the main downside from playing senior inter-county was that they got to spend less time with their family, partner, friends. Furthermore, just less than half indicated that they would prefer to spend more time on their professional life, but were unable to do so because of inter-county time commitments.

In the workshops (Appendix B.2), the players spoke about (i) having no time to do things that allowed them to 'switch off' or to engage in other hobbies, (ii) being expected to be role models '24/7', and (iii) although amateurs, the pressure of being in the 'public eye' and the 'media' more generally (the pundits/commentators on the radio, television, newspapers, social media – Twitter, etc.). Thus, various competing demands (e.g., work, family and inter-county), along with the pressures that they feel from playing inter-county (e.g., time commitments, effort required, being continuously in the public eye and open to scrutiny by the media and general public) may be affecting some players' mental well-being. From a player welfare perspective, this is an issue that warrants further research: in particular, to identify whether the mental well-being finding is seasonal (confined to the championship time period) or persistent (throughout the year).

### **8.2.10 Off-season**

The results from the study showed that 40 per cent of players had no time off from Gaelic games during 2016, and for the 60 per cent that did have time off, the average duration of the break was 5 weeks. Having an official off-season is important, as athletes who have no time off from their sport and continuous competition are at greater risk of player burnout (Weinberg and Gould, 2003).

This player welfare issue would need to be addressed initially at Annual Congress. If such a motion (to introduce an official off-season) was brought before Congress and was successfully approved, there is scope for the GPA, as the main body with responsibility for player welfare, to play a proactive role in ensuring its implementation. County Boards would also need to take an active role in the enforcement of an off-season, with county management teams being willing to put players' welfare ahead of team success and abide by such a measure.

There have been attempts in the past to introduce an off-season, but it has never been successfully enforced. With the greater awareness and understanding of

senior inter-county players' commitments that should come from what is documented in this report, there may be more of an appetite on the part of all stakeholders to work together to ensure its successful implementation.

#### **8.2.11 Relationship between club and county**

With regard to the relationship between club and county, the overwhelming majority of 2016 players (over 90 per cent) felt that their club had a major role in their development as player, with a similar proportion indicating that there was a high level of pride within the club that the individual was representing the club on the county team. Almost two-thirds indicated that their club management team was understanding in instances where inter-county commitments restricted them in club activities (training or matches). Fifty-seven per cent of players were satisfied with the amount of time that they got to spend with both their club and county during the 2016 pre-season. However, this figure fell to about 50 per cent during the national league and championship playing periods.

Regarding player welfare, the arrangements between club and county managers appear somewhat ad-hoc across counties and codes. There may be grounds for considering a more systemised relationship between club and county management, as with college management that was mentioned earlier, in order to minimise the time commitments and training load on inter-county players. As well as protecting players' welfare, this collaboration is about keeping players involved and enjoying the games, thus safeguarding the future of the games too.

#### **8.2.12 Positive aspects of playing senior inter-county**

Despite the very considerable time commitments and knock-on effects for other aspects of players' lives, such as time spent focusing on careers, personal relationships, etc., very few players cited 'too demanding' as their reason for ceasing playing at the end of the 2016 season. In fact, one overriding finding from the research was that the vast majority of 2016 players were glad that they made the choice to play senior inter-county. It is important to note, however, that they might enjoy playing equally, if not more so, without the additional commitments and demands that they now face in relation to extra training, travel time and non-playing preparation.

Players indicated that they benefited from inter-county participation on a number of fronts. In particular, 2016 players felt that it enhanced their leadership skills and self-confidence, equipped them with networks that would benefit them in their professional careers, and enabled them to develop skills to work under pressure. Thus there are positive sport-to-work spill-overs through the development of these transferable skills.

### 8.3 FUTURE WORK

It is important to note that the current study seeks to establish the broad parameters of Gaelic players' senior inter-county time commitments and the implications across a number of dimensions, as discussed above. Nevertheless, more work is needed in this area, some of which can be achieved through a more in-depth analysis of the current data: for example, multivariate analysis of the factors determining (i) injury risk; (ii) playing when injured; (iii) the mental well-being of players; and (iv) the decision to cease playing. Further examination is also needed on the trade-offs around the decisions related to career paths and playing senior inter-county.

Other questions that warrant consideration for further research on foot of the findings from this study include the following.

- (i) As amateurs, why are players giving this level of commitment to their sport?
- (ii) Would players consider withdrawing if they were not enjoying playing senior inter-county?
- (iii) In playing senior inter-county,
  - what issues would players like to see more attention given to that would facilitate them to play at this level?
  - what might they change about the inter-county set-up?
  - what aspects of their experience might they modify?

Another key area that requires additional examination is the use of dietary supplements by inter-county players. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this is now an integral part of most players' lives. However, very little is known about: (i) where players are sourcing their supplements, (ii) if their intake is being monitored within their county set-up, and (iii) whether players have enough knowledge about the long-term consequences of taking supplements. From a player welfare perspective, it would be beneficial to have additional insight on these matters.

### 8.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

So, where to from here? As mentioned already, even though the commitments involved in playing senior inter-county have adverse effects, most players are glad that they made the choice to play at this level.

Given this, how can the GAA and GPA ensure that players remain keen to play senior inter-county and, at the same time, address some of the issues identified in this research? Suggestions have been proposed in this chapter for some of the specific player welfare issues, and matters that warrant further discussion and



research have been identified. However, the underlying source of many of the player welfare issues identified remains: how can the *time commitments* that are being required of players be addressed?

Is there anything involved in playing the current game that can be cut back on or eliminated? Is all the training that is being undertaken, and therefore the time commitment given, needed to get the results? How far have the actual games, and the GAA in general, progressed, in terms of the time that is being invested: not just by the players, but by managers, County-Board officials and those operating at the national level? Are the end results any different to the situation prior to the introduction of the performance measures (sports conditioning, GPS, video analysis, visualisation, meditation, etc.) that have given rise to the extra time commitments required of players?

As mentioned already, sports conditioning is one such measure that has been identified through this research that has noticeably increased the time commitments of players. This form of training was gradually brought into Gaelic games by team coaches seeking ways to enhance the performance levels of their players and provide an extra edge: this has been the objective with all performance measures introduced into the games over the past decade or so. And yet, has this type of training, and the time involved, changed the outcomes: has there been a change in the teams that are winning championship and national league titles since the increased focus on this type of training? While the benefits of sports conditioning, in terms of performance and injury prevention, are recognised, it needs to be acknowledged that such training has increased players' training loads and inter-county time commitments. In addition, might there be a training load threshold beyond which this type of training is hindering players' performance and/or increasing their risk of injury? This is especially a factor given that the extra training sessions, and the time taken to travel to and from such training, mean that players are getting less sleep: a well-established natural performance and recovery tool. Players are also getting less relaxation and downtime with their family, partner and friends, which is important for their welfare and sport performance.

While many may not want to hear this – especially those who are benefiting from developments in the games – is there a need to 'pause' to examine how the senior inter-county player time commitment issue can be addressed? Is there a need for the associations to lead as opposed to being led in this regard? Answering these questions may require full examination of the performance measures that have been introduced into the games in the past 10 years or so to identify whether the measures are aiding players' overall welfare, not just their performance.

There may be other structural and/or organisational issues that are contributing to time pressures/player welfare issues and are more within the direct control of the

GAA: for example, the relationship between County Board and inter-county management team, the increased relevance/status of the GAA/Gaelic games and consequent media and supporter attention/pressure, irregular payments to some inter-county and club managers (GAA, 2018a), the coaching qualification levels of inter-county team management teams, the medical personnel attached to inter-county teams, modifications to competition structures ('back door' system, 'Super 8s', changes to minor and U21 grades, etc.), HE competitions, the frequency of matches/replays, development and academy squads, and the scheduling of club games. Examination of these potential issues was outside of the scope of the current study and therefore requires further research.

Although players are aware of the time commitments involved in playing senior inter-county, and the effects that these are having on their lives, they may not want to see a reversal of some measures that have enhanced their performance levels over the past decade or so. However, not disrespecting these players and/or their contribution to the games, this issue needs to be addressed from the viewpoint of safeguarding not just these players' welfare, but the welfare future generations of players as well. Otherwise, there is a risk that current developments will lead Gaelic games to be as they are perceived, a 'young man's game'.

This period of pause and examination is particularly important if the performance measures that have increased the time commitments of inter-county players have started to filter down to the club-level and to the inter-county under-age set-up (e.g. academies). While there are cost issues with the existing situation at the senior inter-county level, for some county boards more than others there will be further cost implications if such club and inter-county under-age developments take place, or expand beyond what has already been put in place. This is not all about costs, but it is an important issue that needs to be considered.

Finally, the senior inter-county time commitment issue needs to be examined to ensure that the games are played in a way that enables players to continue to enjoy them and that is not damaging to other aspects of their lives. This will help to ensure that players remain involved in the games when they cease playing with their inter-county team and become, in the future, the kind of volunteers who gave them their initial *grá* for the games.

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## APPENDIX A: CHAPTER 2 SUPPLEMENTARY WORK

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### A.1 SUMMARY OF CURRENT GAA PLAYER WELFARE AND GAMES DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND RESOURCES<sup>148</sup>

1. Anti-Doping Education Strategy for 2016–2019.
  - a. Tutor network
  - b. Information sheets
  - c. Distribution of wallet cards
  - d. Specific senior inter-county online course
  - e. Advice on nutrition and supplements
    - i. Recipes for success
    - ii. Advice sheet on supplement
2. Concussion
  - a. Concussion management guidelines
  - b. Education workshops for stakeholders
  - c. National concussion symposium
  - d. UPMC concussion education and baseline testing pilot
3. Cardiac Screening
  - a. Position paper and template questionnaire
  - b. Referral pathway
  - c. GPA screening
4. Defibrillators
  - a. Guidelines for purchase, maintenance, storage
  - b. Purchase, replacement and maintenance scheme
5. Injury Prevention
  - a. National Injury Surveillance & Player Monitoring Database
  - b. GAA 15
    - i. Resources
    - ii. Inclusion in coach education
  - c. Guidelines for appropriate and safe training
  - d. Hurling helmets
    - i. Advice sheet
    - ii. Compulsory standard
  - e. Mouthguards
    - i. Advice sheet
    - ii. Compulsory rule
6. General Player Welfare
  - a. Mentor programme

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<sup>148</sup> Information provided by the GAA.

- i. Higher Education – player welfare advocate programme
  - ii. Ulster Council pilot
- b. GAA Learning App
- c. GAA Player Conference 2018
  - i. Player welfare booklet
- d. Community Team
  - 1. GAA play in my boots (mental health)
  - 2. Alcohol and substance abuse prevention policy
  - 3. Healthy clubs
  - 4. Critical incident response
- 7. Medical Facilities
  - a. Medical bags
  - b. Oversight of facilities in county grounds
- 8. Research
  - a. Currently examining the epidemiology of injury within elite level Gaelic football (led by Liam Moffett): the level and effects of modified training on the injury status of an inter-county GAA team (based on data collected from previous seasons covering the Mayo senior football team).
  - b. While injury surveillance continues through the Injury Database, funding has also been given to a DCU research project (led by Dr Noel McCaffrey) to investigate hip injuries in elite Gaelic footballers.

## **A.2 GPA PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES PARTICIPATION NUMBERS: 2010–END 2017**

### **Career:**

1. 1,203 players engaged in the career development programme;
2. 153 players partook in the business start-up and development programme;
3. 184 players participated in presentation and public speaking courses.

### **Education:**

1. 389 players sought education advice;
2. 5,465 GPA third-level scholarships were awarded.

**Life Focus:**

1. 1,028 players participated in the personal development coaching programme;
2. 110 players have graduated from the Jim Madden GPA leadership programme;
3. 295 players sought financial advice.

**Health and Well-Being:**

1. Between 2012 and the end of 2017, 495 players used the GPA's 24/7 counselling phone line service, which is available 365 days of the year (29 in 2012; 82 in 2013; 109 in 2014; 114 in 2015; 84 in 2016; and 77 in 2017). The issues covered included addiction (gambling and alcohol); emotional/personal (bereavement, depression, relationships, etc.); physical health; marital/family (children, family conflict, etc.); and personal trauma (e.g., bereaved by suicide).

### **A.3 SUMMARY OF GPA PLAYER WELFARE MEASURES PURSUED AND/OR IMPLEMENTED OVER THE YEARS<sup>149</sup>**

1. Under the most recent GAA/GPA recognition agreement (*Recognition Protocol 2017–2019*), the GPA negotiated an increased standard mileage rate for travel expenses from 50c to 65c per mile for senior inter-county players. In addition, players now receive a €20 per week food allowance to assist with the nutritional costs associated with playing senior inter-county.
2. The GPA established a Players Safety and Welfare Group in 2016. This group has been tasked with examining all aspects of player safety and welfare: in particular, anti-doping protocols and the comprehensive education of all players, concussion policies, the physical and psychological demands being placed on inter-county players, and welfare issues pertaining to the sustainability of the modern game. Some projects the group are currently working on are:
  - a. Proposal for minimum standards of care for all medical personnel involved in inter-county teams, including accreditation for strength and conditioning coaches;

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<sup>149</sup> Information provided by the GPA.

- b. Examination of two years of data from over 2,000 inter-county players exploring the prevalence of hip and groin, lower limb and overload injuries, applying the HAGOS methodology.<sup>150</sup>
3. Many of the recommendations from the 2015 GPA Third-Level Student report (Lane, 2015) have been implemented in rule at recent GAA Annual Congresses (e.g. moving U21 football championship to U20).
4. The GPA motion to maximise promotion and increase attendances for Tier 3–5 hurling competitions was successfully passed at the 2018 GAA Congress.
5. The GPA published gambling guidelines for players in 2016.
6. The GPA has ongoing supports and initiatives promoting the importance and awareness of positive emotional health and well-being (e.g. WeWearMore campaign).
7. The GPA has a benevolent fund for current and former players who have experienced financial difficulty.
8. As part of the most recent GAA/GPA recognition agreement, the GPA negotiated the establishment of a surgical fund for former players.
9. The GPA has conducted cardiac screening of over 4,000 players since 2011.
10. The GPA offers enhanced injury benefits for all players for irrecoverable loss of expenses. This scheme supplements the GAA's injury scheme.
11. The GPA has provided dental protection/gumshields to all football members since 2011.

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<sup>150</sup> <https://bjism.bmj.com/content/bjsports/45/6/478.full.pdf>

## **APPENDIX B: CHAPTER 4 SUPPLEMENTARY WORK**

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### **B.1 SUMMARY OF GAMES DEVELOPMENT OFFICER WORKSHOP**

#### **1. Introduction**

This workshop took place in Croke Park in March 2017. Twenty-three third-level Games Development Officers (GDOs) were invited to attend, of whom ten did. Of those who could not attend, some provided written submissions on the topics discussed.

An overview of the research work was given to the GDOs. Specifically:

- the background to the research;
- the research objectives;
- the research methodology;
- the time-frame of the study.

#### **2. Initial Thoughts on Player Welfare from GDOs**

- They wondered if there is any way that players could be educated from a time management perspective;
- They believe there is an erosion of the status of the third-level competitions;
- They noted the overlap between college and inter-county play and felt the need for breathing space and to take a holistic view of the player, not a short-term view;
- They noted that the GPA and Club Players Association (CPA) give players a voice, but are not there helping with day-to-day support;
- They felt that the types of supports they can give include monetary supports and finance, advice, meal vouchers and sports conditioning.

#### **3. Positives of Playing Senior Inter-County**

The GDOs identified the following areas as the positive aspects for players of playing senior inter-county:

- sense of reward, feeling that the hard work has paid off;
- friendships;
- improved physical health;
- enjoyment;
- career success – more likely to ‘go down the education route than work on a building site’;
- prestige and status;

- gaining a profile in terms of getting a career ‘down the line’;
- developing a network that can help them ‘down the road’;
- support: some from the GPA but a lot ‘falling through the cracks’, and they need ‘help that the GPA could offer’. One GDO noted that the college services ‘are overrun’.

#### **4. Negatives of Playing Senior Inter-County**

Regarding the negatives of playing senior inter-county, the GDOs identified the following.

- Mental health: they are under pressure to keep everyone happy. There is a ‘free-fall if a player is put into inter-county and doesn’t make the cut’. A new manager coming in can change everything;
- They can feel like outsiders in a college setting;
- The players can have financial worries, and with the increased time commitments they have limited time to earn money;
- Identity: as they progress they may realise that they won’t make the inter-county team;
- Playing inter-county limits life experience and capacity to travel, and informs choices;
- Relationships are impacted: one GDO mentioned that players might be single deliberately, with ‘more opportunities for casual relationships’. They added that they may have strong physical relationships but not strong mental relationships. Another mentioned the need for an understanding partner when you are an inter-county player;
- Players want to play for the college – ‘they want to play, not train’ – but ‘county teams are king’ and ‘they make the decision’;
- Injuries: when a player is recovering and the county manager calls him, ‘they get injured again and are back to square one’. There is pressure from all angles: ‘club, county and college’.

#### **5. The Role of the Club**

In relation to players’ clubs, the GDOs indicated the following.

- Unless the club is successful it doesn’t impact on players’ college involvement.
- There is no down time and players are playing all year round (clubs are now training/playing earlier in the year).
- One GDO questioned the level of commitment demanded of the players and suggested that mentally they might ‘need a break’.



## 6. The Role of the GDOs

- Players go to GDOs when ‘they are in real trouble’, ‘last resort’, ‘A&E’;
- They feel that the message might be getting lost that they (the GDOs) are there for the players. They noted that an element of trust exists between some players and their GDO, and the GDOs need to build a relationship with the players;
- There is often academic trouble and players fail to realise that they are struggling until the end of the year. The GDOs go to the lecturers to see if they can do anything – ‘they need to pass exams at the end of the day’. In some instances, GDOs talk to county managers. Sometimes the lecturers can be flexible, other times not and the player has to repeat their exam(s).

## B.2 SUMMARY OF SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYER WORKSHOPS

### 1. Introduction

The four provincial senior inter-county player welfare research workshops took place in February and March 2017. For each workshop, three players from each of the 2016 county teams within each province, both hurling and football, were invited to attend. The three players were randomly selected on the basis of age: we chose players of different ages – younger (18–23), middle (24–27) and older (28+) – in order to identify the impact that playing senior inter-county has on players lives according to their life stage. To protect the anonymity of the players, the workshops will be referred to as Workshop A, B, C and D.

**TABLE B.2.1 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYER WORKSHOP ATTENDEE INFORMATION: 2016 PLAYERS**

Workshop A	Workshop B	Workshop C	Workshop D
Attendees: 37.5% football 62.5% hurling Average age: 25.6 (youngest 20 and oldest 30)	Attendees: 80% football 20% hurling Average age: 27.2 (youngest 21 and oldest 34)	Attendees: 39.4% football 60.6% hurling Average age: 29.3 (youngest 20 and oldest 31)	Attendees: 20% football 80% hurling Average age: 25.3 (youngest 21 and oldest 32)

Source: Constructed by authors.

For all workshops, some players who had initially signed up were unable to attend. This was mainly due to changes in their county team’s training day, mid-term exams, or unforeseen work commitments.

Each workshop commenced with an overview of the research: motivation, objectives, methodology, outcomes and players’ role in the process. Players were then broken into groups, or an open discussion took place among all present, to go through the objectives of the research and to identify players’ experiences of

playing senior inter-county.

In the summary of the workshops that follows, there is some overlap in the issues discussed by players when they were asked to identify (i) the main areas of their lives outside of inter-county that were affected by playing at this level, (ii) the commitments required to play senior inter-county, and (iii) the negative effects of playing at this level.

## **2. Main Areas of Players' Lives Outside of Senior Inter-County Affected by Playing at this Level**

The first issue that players were asked to discuss at the workshops was to identify the main areas of their lives outside of senior inter-county that were affected by playing at this level. The following areas were identified.

### ***Professional Career (Work/Study)***

Players' professional career was a key area. In Workshop A, players spoke about balancing playing inter-county with:

- exam time;
- career progression (limited due to time commitments);
- work location choice (selected by some to minimise travel to and from training; not likely to migrate, although there might be better job opportunities abroad, so that they can play inter-county).

Similarly, in Workshop C players spoke about their work and study and, in particular, challenges in progressing up the career ladder. However, the players also felt that playing inter-county can broaden their job prospects or opportunities, and broaden networks generally. Some players noted, though, that 'it can be that your career path is decided for you'.

### ***Relationships (Family, Friends, Partner)***

A second major topic of discussion in the workshops was how playing inter-county affected personal relationships with family, partners and friends. In Workshop A, players discussed the following.

- They miss out on family and friend events, such as weddings and christenings.
- For some, they could attend events but no consumption of alcohol was permitted. Also, some could attend but would have to depart in the evening for training and return afterwards.
- Some players felt that family formation could be stalled, i.e. no kids.

- Some players arranged their weddings around inter-county and club football – a lot of December weddings.
- In some situations, relationships can be strained (e.g. because of a player's mood) and/or underdeveloped. Nevertheless, players stressed that family, friends and partners are all forms of support for them when playing.

Similarly, in Workshop C players discussed how their relationships with family, friends, girlfriends/partners and teammates were impacted:

- some said 'it's a selfish existence';
- others described how they are unsupportive of family members who support them;
- some spoke about having to balance things if they have dependants.

Players in Workshop D also noted the impact on their social and family lives and, in particular, their capacity to spend time with family. They noted as well that their friendship circles tended to be narrow in that they had many 'club friends' or 'sports-oriented friends', but found it hard to make the time for their 'other' friends (school, college, work, etc.). They discussed how they missed family and friend events (weddings, christenings, birthdays, etc.).

### ***Social Life***

In addition to their personal relationships, the workshops highlighted how some players felt they had to sacrifice their social life. In Workshop A, players noted how playing inter-county impacted on their:

- consumption of alcohol: no drinking, or alcohol restrictions;
- going to the cinema;
- no time to do things that allowed them to 'switch off'.

In Workshop C, players also noted that they had:

- no set time off – everything the players do is decided by whether it is best for the GAA;
- no time for drinking and socialising, going out for dinner, going to the cinema or just relaxing.

Also:

- some players described having a different college experience and not being members of societies or going on class trips etc.;
- in a county panel, some players felt that their social network is small;

- when they retire, ‘there is a void’ because of, in some cases, the narrowness of their inter-county circle.

Players in Workshop D noted that they cannot drink or socialise, which is a problem for some. They indicated as well that attitudes to alcohol varied by manager. Players felt that ‘too much was made of drink’. Some felt that players are worse when they are only allowed to ‘drink sporadically’ with feelings that they had to ‘make up time’. The players acknowledged that they were not going to make the team if they ‘went mad’ so they were ‘sensible enough as a result’.

### ***Hobbies***

Linked to discussions around players’ social lives were opinions on their ability to have hobbies or play sports other than GAA. In Workshop A, players felt that they had limited, or no, time to play music; participate in other sports (e.g. golf); or undertake coaching, whether that be GAA or for non-GAA sports (e.g., rugby), charity involvement, etc.

- Some county players felt that involvement in other sports (e.g. soccer) is frowned on.
- Some players dropped other sports that they used to play in conjunction with Gaelic games, due mainly to time constraints.

Similarly, in Workshop C players discussed their lack of hobbies because of playing inter-county: for example, music or cinema or other sports, including tag rugby or five-a-side soccer.

### ***Holidays/Travel***

Players in Workshops A and C noted that they were not able to go on holidays with friends or family during the usual holiday period (summer months). In particular, players (Workshop A) noted how they had to go at the last minute (when flights and accommodation are more expensive) because of uncertainty as to how far the team would go in the championship, and then having club commitments after the inter-county season ended.

### ***Financial***

Another key consideration for players was the financial implications of playing senior inter-county. Players in Workshop A noted that the cost of living was higher due to spending on ‘health foods’. For some, this included supplements. Some players felt that they spent less on food because they were buying ‘healthy food’ as opposed to ‘take-aways’. Other players felt that they were buying ‘healthy foods’ anyway because they were conscious of looking after themselves properly

(i.e. it wasn't because they played inter-county).

Similarly, in Workshops C and D players discussed the financial commitments of playing senior inter-county, which included spending on food/diet, nutrition, mileage and gear. In Workshop D, players also spoke about:

- not being able to have a part-time job;
- the amount of money they have to spend on supplements;
- They had to spend more money on food and nutrition;
- getting vouchers for boots and gear.

Players in college spoke about rent and the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) education grant as an income source. However, some county players pointed out that they were on the wrong side of the threshold for getting a SUSI payment because of their parents' income. The issues around finances created pressure for these players.

### ***Personal***

Other issues raised by players in Workshop A included a lack of their own personal time: no 'down time', 'time to yourself'.

### **3. Commitments Required to Play Senior Inter-County**

Following on from this, players were asked to discuss what commitments they felt were being demanded of them. The following demands/expectations were identified.

#### ***Time***

In Workshop A, players felt that, in some instances, it was more 'expectations' than 'commitments'. Players focused on the amount of time required to meet all their commitments, which included:

- training – five/six nights per week; group and individual; field and gym-based;
- matches;
- team meetings – number of meetings varies; game week will be different – pre-match preparation meeting and then post-match review meeting; the duration of meetings varies also;
- video analysis – group and individual;
- recovery time.

In Workshop C, the players emphasised that their personal time was the main

commitment given in order to be an inter-county player. They also outlined:

- the time taken up with travelling to and from activities in five of the seven nights of the week;
- the time given to training, gym, mobility and recovery, and the overall length of the season.

In Workshop D, players felt that playing inter-county was 24 hours a day. They also discussed the amount of time travelling to and from training. Players spoke about the time spent on their inter-county commitments in the evening often lasting from 5pm to 1am. They discussed the need for rehabilitation and prehabilitation from 6 to 9.30pm, and that their 'downtime' was eating.

### ***Game Preparation***

In Workshop A, players discussed how they had to prepare for games.

- They have to ensure that they are getting enough sleep prior to matches, and enough recovery time after games. This applies to training as well, so that they can perform at the next training session and minimise the risk of injury.
- They have to 'get into the zone' for games. Some teams have sports psychologists, or access to this type of resource, and these individuals can help them with this part of game preparation, through the provision of advice and tools such as visualisation and mindfulness.
- Game preparation is viewed as a commitment by players because they cannot go out socialising with friends, family or partners in the lead-up to matches.

### ***Professional Career (Work/Study)***

Some players in Workshop A indicated that by being an inter-county player they are expected to sacrifice their career. Their professional career can be put on hold because, for example, due to various time commitments, they cannot put in extra work that is required for promotion. Also, depending on a player's profession, some can miss out on the opportunity to travel abroad with their work; hence they are missing out on different types of work experience. Some players cannot work 'extra hours', e.g. overtime; hence they incur a financial cost of playing inter-county.

In Workshop B, one player indicated that he had become self-employed because, as an inter-county player, he was not able to do overtime; hence he was prevented from being promoted/progressing in his professional career: he became self-employed to make up for what he had lost out on, financially and in a career progression sense. However, he also felt that the profile he had developed as an

inter-county player provided opportunities in this regard.

Players in Workshop B felt that their job had to be flexible to enable them to play inter-county, and the nature of the work not too taxing. They, and players in other workshops as well, indicated that they had selected careers/occupations/jobs that they felt gave them the flexibility required to play inter-county (e.g. civil service, teachers). Some players indicated that they had gone back to college to retrain in another profession, often teaching, as they discovered that the work and time commitments associated with the initial career path they had chosen (e.g. engineering) were not conducive to playing inter-county.

Players in Workshop B indicated that playing inter-county was often made easier for them by having managers and colleagues who had an interest in GAA and, therefore, were understanding and supportive of their inter-county commitments.

In Workshop C, players spoke about their career and/or education, including:

- prioritising GAA over work/career, making it difficult to climb the career ladder in work. Having to change shifts or ‘get off early’ to accommodate training. Being ‘wrecked’ the day after training;
- prioritising GAA over their education.

### ***Hobbies***

Players in Workshop A felt they are expected to give up their hobbies: playing music, coaching, anything that allows them to ‘tune out’, ‘unwind’, etc.

### ***Role Models and the Media***

Players in Workshop A felt that they are expected to be role models ‘24/7’. They are always in the public eye and they are expected to behave in a certain way, with no bad behaviour or ‘devilment’ permitted in public; otherwise, they could end up on the sporting pages in the papers, on Twitter, or in some other media outlet.

In Workshop C, players spoke about the pressure of being in the public eye and the media more generally. This was also raised in Workshop D, where players spoke about the need for time out away from GAA.

- They don’t want to listen to pundits, as ‘some of it sticks in your head’.
- Everyone believes what commentators say.
- Family can ‘be as bad’, and players often don’t want to listen to them either.

Players talked also about the radio and newspapers – they felt that whether or not they listened to, or read, what was being said depended on the stage in their inter-

county career. Some felt that ‘you get thick-skinned after a while’. They appreciated that ‘some people understand the game’ in these circles. Other players spoke about social media and said that they had deleted the Facebook and Twitter apps from their phones (this, the players also felt, depended on the stage of their inter-county career).

### ***Sleep/Recovery***

In Workshop A, players spoke about how some teams’ sleep is monitored. The players indicated that this was a form of player welfare; it is used to determine if a player will train, and if so, the quantity and type of training.

### ***Diet and Nutrition***

In Workshop A, players discussed the need to eat the best types of food, or ‘clean eating’. They noted the following.

- A lot of teams have nutritionists. For some teams, these individuals provide meal plans; for others they provide guidance/educate the players, who are left to make their own decisions on what to consume.
- Some teams are monitored in this regard: for example, body composition measurements (through the use of skin-fold tests), food diaries, DEXA scans.

In Workshop D, the players spoke about the amount of time and work it takes to prepare their food and the costs associated with this.

### ***Supplements, Drug Testing and General Medicines***

While it would appear that the use of supplements has become an integral part of most Gaelic players’ lives, the players in Workshop A indicated that this can often be management-team-dependent, i.e. not all managers have bought into supplement usage.

- For teams that use supplements, players in Workshop A felt that use is usually determined by the management team, via the team’s nutritionist, as opposed to players themselves choosing to take supplements; and the type, quantity and frequency of use are mainly based on players’ strength and conditioning. This would particularly relate to the use of protein (mainly whey) for gym-based work.
- For some teams in Workshop A, players are required to take recovery-based supplements: the type, quantity and frequency are, again, determined by the management team. Some players take fish oils, vitamins and minerals. In this situation, usage is mainly individual-based, but sometimes the team’s nutritionist will recommend supplements, often as a result of monitoring



players' nutritional intake. The costs of individual-based supplements are usually covered by the players.

- For other teams in Workshop A, players said that the supplements (both protein-based and recovery) are provided to them, so there is no extra cost for the players. However, this is not the case for all teams, particularly the weaker/lower division teams (in both hurling and football). For these teams, and even in some teams where the protein and recovery supplements are provided, some players are individually choosing to take supplements, the costs for which are covered by the players themselves. In these instances, the use of supplements is usually for gym-related reasons (i.e. sports conditioning sessions) as opposed to a form of recovery.
- The players in this workshop felt that drug testing, and information around it, is mainly driven by the GAA. A lot of players have an app on their phone that allows them to scan the barcode of products that they are considering purchasing in order to ensure that there are no banned substances in the product. Some players, however, may be purchasing products over the internet.
- In relation to drug testing, some players indicated that it is needed to protect the welfare of Gaelic games. They also said that it is a requirement of the grant that they receive from the Government.
- In the context of drug testing, therapeutic use exemptions (TUEs) are permitted in Gaelic games. However, players have to be careful about general medicines and what they can and cannot use for general ailments: headaches, toothaches, the common cold, etc. In these instances, players will often contact their team doctor before taking a medication to ensure that it does not contain a banned substance.

In Workshop D, the players spoke about the use of supplements also. In particular they discussed the use of team-based supplements, with many saying that the costs of these were covered and the team nutritionist 'looked after this'. The team doctor also provided guidance on fish oils, protein (whey), Lean Gain (calories), drinks (electrolytes), etc.).

### ***Sponsors***

Players in Workshop A spoke how the team sponsorship agreement is usually between the sponsor and the county board. Usually the only requirement of players (but not all) is to go to the launch event. Although it takes time to do this, it was not viewed by the players as being burdensome. Some players seek out individual sponsorship by their own choice. This can be a source of income for unemployed players, but employed players engage in this activity as well.

Some players in Workshop B indicated that individual sponsors can often put

pressure on the players they are sponsoring, e.g. to attend certain promotion events or undertake promotion activities. Once they are sponsoring the player, they have certain expectations of him. This, the players in this workshop indicated, does not happen with the official team sponsor.

### ***Promotion of the Game***

In Workshop A, players felt that the promotion of the game can be a requirement of players, for both their club and county, and takes different forms: coaching, presenting medals, etc. Although events like medal/gear presentations can be time consuming, and players don't always feel like doing these types of activities (because they are already time-poor, tired, etc.), most players still enjoy this type of game promotion activity because they can recall days from when they were younger when county players made presentations to them, or they met them through some activity, and the impact that this had on them to play the game. They also want to give something back to the game because of what they have got from it.

## **4. Positive Impact of Playing Senior Inter-County**

The next issue that players were asked to discuss was what they felt were the positive impacts of playing senior inter-county. The following were identified.

### ***Health***

In Workshop A, players firstly spoke about the impact of playing GAA on their health.

- A good performance, in either a game or training, would increase players' self-esteem and confidence.
- The regular exercise of playing hurling and/or football was having a positive impact on both their physical (e.g. lower incidence of disease) and mental health.
- Success and winning, however, could have both positive and negative effects on players' mental health: often determined, according to the players, by a player's own personality, i.e. how they responded to and could handle winning/losing, good/bad days, etc.

Players agreed that they get enjoyment from playing inter-county and that this is very important to them. However, some players commented that the level of enjoyment derived from the game depends on a player's position in the team, i.e. there can be a big difference in the enjoyment experienced by those on the first 15/21 compared to those towards the tail end of the panel.

Players in Workshop B indicated that they feel physically fitter and sharper, and that they would not get this anywhere else. In addition, they said that feeling physically fitter meant they felt better mind-wise too.

In Workshop C, players discussed the mental health advantage of playing inter-county in that it was a good release from exams. They also noted physical advantages, in that they had to have a healthy lifestyle and diet and keep themselves physically fit, and it offered them an outlet.

### ***Personal***

Players in Workshop A discussed how playing inter-county helps them personally; in particular how:

- it gives them an opportunity to express themselves;
- they get opportunities to travel, for example to the United States (as students on J-1 visas), or as part of an International Rules team;
- it is often a family tradition – some players get extra support from their families from being on an inter-county team, and their family (close and extended) take pride in having a son, brother, uncle, nephew, cousin on an inter-county team.

Players are aware of what is required to play inter-county and, in general, are doing this because they want to – they said that the decision was a personal choice.

Playing with the county team can give players status, but the players in Workshop B indicated that not all players were interested in this.

Players in Workshop C spoke about the sense of achievement and enjoyment of the game.

- They are playing a sport that they love, and that brings great enjoyment.
- It gives their life structure; it makes them proactive and organised. It gives routine and a more disciplined lifestyle.
- Players were aware that within their life-span there is not a lot of time for playing senior inter-county, or Gaelic games in general, so they should make the most of it.
- It gives them transferable qualities/skills, such as teamwork and leadership.

These players also spoke about the pride of playing GAA:

- family pride;
- community ambassador;
- winning status.

Similarly, in Workshop D players spoke about the pride of what they have achieved and what they are doing – the pride to ‘wear the jersey’. They felt that they gained status for work if they were well known in a certain team, although this varies by team and position within the team.

### ***Professional Career (Work/Study)***

In Workshop A, players felt that playing inter-county can increase employment opportunities, e.g. a player’s profile can help them to get certain jobs. Playing inter-county gives players good life tools, and the skills that they develop (time management, self-discipline, leadership, teamwork, etc.) are transferable, and can be equally applied in a work environment.

Similarly, in Workshop C players spoke about the lifestyle opportunities that were opened up to them.

- It can help to get them into a particular college or a job.
- It offers networking opportunities.
- Characteristics of sport links to the workplace (i.e. transferable skills that can be valued by employers).
- It improves their personal profile.

In Workshop C, players listed a number of other positive elements of playing senior inter-county:

- recognition and self-enrichment when things go well;
- incentives and sponsorship deals (but not evenly spread);
- representation;
- travel opportunities:
- team trips: USA.

### ***Social***

In Workshop A, players felt that playing inter-county gives an opportunity to meet new people, and to develop friendships for life.

Similarly, in Workshop C players noted how playing offered friendships and the opportunity to meet new people. Others noted how they could meet ‘Jersey birds’/‘free into Coppers’, and the value and support of the GAA community.

## **5. Negative Impact of Playing Senior Inter-County Football/Hurling**

Following on from this, players outlined the negative effects of playing senior inter-

county.

### ***Mental Health***

Players in Workshop A detailed a number of ways in which playing inter-county impacted negatively on their mental health.

- Losing a game can impact a player's mood for days: they can feel a failure/not meeting expectations.
- A 'loss of form', which (as identified by the players) can come about as a result of pressure (either internal or external factors), fatigue, a bad game, etc., can impact a player's confidence, and this can carry through to their work and involvement in other off-field activities. Some players noted that a bad experience in work can also affect their performance on the field.
- The players indicated that a player's individual traits (i.e. personality) will determine how he responds to 'off days', a 'loss of form', etc.
- Often a player's identity can be wrapped up in his sport and he has no life direction outside the game. Specifically, a player can choose to play the game for 7–8 years, 24/7, 11–12 months of the year, and this can become an issue for him towards the end of his inter-county career, mainly impacting his mental health. The players indicated that this negative impact of the game is person-dependent; that such players lack balance in their lives – everything is, more or less, given to the game with little or no input into the other components of their lives (professional career, family, friends, other hobbies, etc.). The players in Workshop A indicated that all players need to give some consideration to the duration for which 'inter-county' is going to be a priority in their life.
- Sometimes the time commitments involved can cause stress and this can be overwhelming.

Players in Workshop B indicated that confidence can take a bigger hit at inter-county than at club level. They also indicated that, given the amount of time that they commit to training plus the level that they train at, non-team selection can be tough to take. This can spill over into other areas of their lives: work, relationships, college, etc. Again, they indicated that a player's personality traits can play a role in how well he takes such team news on the back of the intensive training. Players also take team selection decisions tougher because of social media.

The desire to play and win at the inter-county level can lead to a vicious circle of training and working hard, particularly if a team loses a game. In this situation, there is 'no hair-letting-down time'. If a team gets beaten, they want to train harder, e.g. train on a Monday and Tuesday instead of just a Tuesday. The players in Workshop B indicated that this response to a loss was driven by the players themselves and not management, and that that it can have both mental and

physical consequences (e.g. burnout).

Over-training can occur among some inter-county players. Some players become addicted to the gym work (i.e. the sports conditioning) or get hooked on other components of inter-county training and they forget about the game itself. The players in Workshop B who raised this point indicated that they did not know if the players that overdo the gym work were more concerned about being Gaelic players or 'sheer athletes'; the players felt that this was more of an issue among Gaelic footballers than hurlers. They indicated that they have seen management having to get counselling assistance for these players.

In Workshop C, players also discussed negative effects of playing inter-county on their mental health, such as:

- constant pressure on players from media and others;
- low mood if they lose a game;
- after a loss, social media can be invasive if there is a personal attack.

In Workshop D, players spoke about the effects of having a bad inter-county game on their mental health:

- after doing all their training;
- for a game that mattered;
- question everything again;
- caught in the mindset of 'should I do more or should I not?';
- impact on people around them (e.g. bad moods);
- impact on work.

Players talked about how they could be constantly worrying or 'beating yourself up if it doesn't go well'. Some players indicated that they tried to minimise this type of negative thinking by focusing on 'ticking every box' in preparation for games/training; after that it's a case of 'whatever happens, happens'. The players spoke about the fact that 'there is more to life and that once you leave the dressing room you have to put it to one side', otherwise it would ruin their relationships/work. Some players indicated that they continue to think about a game that they had lost/hadn't gone well, but have learned to handle this situation better the longer they have been playing. Again, though, a player's ability to do this depended on their personality.

### ***Physical Health***

In Workshop A, players stated that the biggest negative physical health effect from playing inter-county is injuries, some of which require operations (hip, knee, etc.).

In many cases, the long-term impacts of injuries are not known in Gaelic games because in the past the games (football and hurling) were not played at such high intensity as today's games are being played at. Therefore it is too early to know the long-term impacts of the injuries sustained by players currently playing the games.

Physical injuries can also have an impact on player's mental health: players don't want to be injured and being out with an injury can have a negative impact on their mood, particularly if there is uncertainty around the rehabilitation period.

A point made by one of the players in Workshop B is that if they do get injured, they tend to be looked after better than those outside an inter-county set-up (e.g. those playing club only).

Another negative health effect raised in Workshop B is the impact of drugs that players put into their bodies; specifically, anti-inflammatories and cortisone injections. These are taken mostly because of pressure to play, mainly external forces as opposed to internal. It is often about 'getting the player onto the field' without the full long-term consequences being explained, such as the impact that such drugs might have on players' kidneys/livers in the future. However, the player that raised this issue went on to say that use of drugs to keep players playing even when injured is beginning to change. Team doctors play a big role in this regard. At the same time, players themselves are becoming more aware of the issues associated with steroid injections/drugs to enable performance. Consequently they are becoming more proactive. In addition, drug testing is now in place, so whatever medication a player is given and/or takes must not contain any banned substances.

In Workshop B, one of the players raised the use of supplements. While this seems to be a core component of today's game, this player felt that there is still a lot of learning needed around supplements, specifically in terms of their long-term health consequences. He felt that supplements are in some ways replacing/overtaking the issue of use of anti-inflammatories/steroid injections when a player is injured. As indicated previously, use of supplements can be team- or person-driven, but whichever this player felt that there is still a lot of learning required around the long-term consequences of this relatively new performance tool. There is also the drug testing issue. While the assumption is that supplements that are provided through the team are okay, in terms of not containing any banned substances, individually taken supplements can vary and, therefore, players need to be careful of what they are using. The players indicated that the GAA run workshops with county teams to discuss drug testing. In some instances managers reiterate to players that they themselves are responsible for what they put into their bodies, in terms of making sure the supplements they use do not contain any banned ingredients, as it is not just the player's playing career that he

would putting at jeopardy but also his professional career.

In Workshop C players also noted the demands on their physical health:

- physical health – imbalance between county panels' game preparations can lead to trauma injuries;
- sleep – players described how they spend a lot of time travelling to and from training, and are then getting up early the next morning to go to work or college. Because of a lack of sleep, many felt they were not functioning properly.

### ***Professional Career (Work/Study)***

In Workshop A, players outlined the negative impact of playing inter-county on their professional careers.

- The players felt that the impact was 50 per cent positive and 50 per cent negative.
- In terms of employment, the effect depended on a player's position within an organisation. Specifically, the higher up the career ladder that a player wanted to go, the more negative the impact was, because he could not put in the work required to progress in his organisation.
- Some players were taking jobs to facilitate playing.
- Some players were choosing courses in college to facilitate playing.
- In terms of employment opportunities, some players were limiting themselves to posts within their counties, so that they were near training.
- Players' career advancement can be stalled while playing.

In Workshop C, players discussed how playing inter-county impacted on their careers, as they:

- need to get time off work;
- cannot stay for overtime;
- cannot progress in their job.

Similarly, in Workshop D players noted the impact of playing inter-county on their college careers and, in particular, the stress caused by balancing their training and their studying for exams. Some players noted that the Christy Ring Cup was closest to the exams and meant that they were up all night studying. They also felt that they were so tired from playing matches that this impacted on their study/work lives.



***Social/Relationships***

Players in Workshop A noted that their social lives and relationships were negatively impacted by playing inter-county:

- miss nights out with family and/or friends;
- little time off, especially from January to June, July, August;
- few players have children – family formation can be affected.

Players in Workshop B indicated that playing inter-county does not help with long-distance relationships. It can help players to meet partners/potential partners, but the time commitment required does not support the sustainability of long-distance relationships.

Similarly, in Workshop C players spoke about how playing inter-county resulted in:

- lack of time spent with family or girlfriends;
- their 'other half' needing to have patience in order to deal with, for example, a player having low mood after a bad training/game day, loss of form, etc.;
- lack of concentration three to four days before a match and one day after;
- players being limited in their capacity to support the family (as not around);
- missing family weddings, birthdays and events;
- missing friends' weddings and birthdays, and losing friends;
- huge strain on, or a loss of, relationships.

Players in Workshop C noted how they could not drink or socialise:

- handful of times a year players can go to major events;
- cannot be seen out.

In Workshop C, players discussed a number of other negatives from playing senior inter-county.

- Time: Players are spending five to seven nights a week training, and questioned whether the two nights are actually off as they are too tired to do anything. They believe this is just recovery time.
- Large representation on county panel means that the affected clubs suffer.
- Finances: Players spoke about the increased cost of maintaining their diet and the cost of travel.
- Having to travel to and from training can result in a lack of proper structure, inability to organise anything, etc.
- Other hobbies are non-existent as players have no time for them.
- They have a fear of getting injured.

Players in Workshop D noted how their partners had to be very understanding and appreciate the 'love of the game'. Overall, players felt that relationships can take a back seat while playing inter-county, but that playing puts a strain on long-distance relationships. If players were married they had limited time to spend with their wives and, where present, children.

### **6. Impact of Playing Senior Inter-County Football/Hurling on Players' Club Involvement**

The effects of playing inter-county on players' club involvement were both positive and negative.

In terms of the negatives, players in Workshops A and B indicated that playing inter-county:

- restricted the amount of time that they could play/train/be with their club;
- gave rise to high expectations/pressure on the players to perform when they returned from inter-county duty;
- means that that they cannot play club fixtures; however, this varies by county;
- restricted them from socialising with their team after games.

The support received by inter-county players from their clubs varies by county and club. For example, whether a player is admired or resented by his club teammates and club management team can depend on his 'form' when he returns to play for the club.

Regarding the positive effects:

- the inter-county players were role models within their club;
- they had higher fitness and skill levels compared to the average club player and, therefore, helped to improve the performance levels of club players;
- the club could be a support network for some players.

In Workshop D, players said that in the club they were expected to be a leader and that they experienced pressure from the club to perform because they were an inter-county player. They noted that they could not train with the club when they had inter-county games, but that club players 'don't give you a hard time'. The players also said that if they have an injury this can be an issue as the physiotherapist might tell them not to play, but 'you want to play' or are 'put under pressure' to play.

## 7. Other Issues Examined

After consultation with the Oversight Body, players in each of the workshops were asked to consider and discuss a number of additional issues related to playing senior inter-county:

- reasons for playing;
- supports in playing the game;
- inter-county training and the balance between sports conditioning and the traditional skills of the games;
- consideration given to post-playing days;
- changes required for a balance in the GAA.

Players' views on training, specifically the balance between sports conditioning and the traditional skills of the games, and on their post-playing days provided additional insights on the commitments/effects of playing senior inter-county and on players' club involvement. A summary of the discussions that took place on these two topics is presented next.

### ***Balance between Sports Conditioning and the Traditional Skills of the Games***

In Workshop A, one of the first points made in this discussion was that sports conditioning training has, over time, driven more commitment of players, particularly in terms of time.

The players indicated that, given sports conditioning, the level of athleticism in football has gone up considerably compared to 10 years ago, whereas hurling is still predominantly a skills-focused game. The more experienced players at the workshop felt that there is a good balance now between sports conditioning and the skills of the game. They also felt that sports conditioning is much better compared to when it was first introduced into the game, as teams are doing much more with the ball in today's sports conditioning sessions: the players felt that the reason for this is that many sports conditioning coaches are ex-GAA players. In addition, the quality of today's sports conditioning coaches has improved considerably as they are more educated and up to date with advances in the discipline.

The players also indicated that there are some legacy issues from the early days when sports conditioning was first introduced into the games: specifically, some injuries because of the development of inappropriate technique, use of excessive weights, etc.

Players indicated that sports conditioning tends to be seasonal: it is heavily loaded at the start of the season and then there is more of a focus on skills as the year

goes on. Nevertheless, field sessions may include sports conditioning throughout the year.

In Workshop B, players felt that sports conditioning is essential now – that it cannot be done without. Some of the more experienced players in Workshop B felt that most training sessions are skill-based, and this was the case for both field and gym sessions.

Some of the players in Workshop B felt that skills were less important in football now, but that this was not necessarily the case for hurling. They felt that the skills in hurling have improved: that the focus of training is on skills – first touch. Hurling players are told to express themselves: this, it was felt, is the nature of the game. While they indicated that there has been a move by one or two hurling teams in the past year or so to become more tactical (e.g. to have set game plans), by and large most teams go out and hurl. For football, on the other hand, these players felt that the emphasis is on fitness and sports conditioning: sometimes good footballers (with an eye for the ball) can be left sitting on the bench. Given the way that the game has gone, such footballers often leave the game because they are not interested in athleticism. For football, it was also felt that there is more emphasis on tactics and being told how to play as opposed to being allowed to express yourself – game plans and fulfilling a particular role, e.g. hand-passing and support play and less kicking, particularly long kick passing. This, however, can be county-specific. Players felt that they can enjoy the game more when they are allowed to express themselves: they indicated that this is what under-age is about – expressing oneself. The way that football is played in some counties now is about winning at all costs for a lot of teams, but some of the players in Workshop B wondered if the footballers in such set-ups were enjoying the game as much.

In Workshop C, players spoke about sports conditioning being more important in football than the skills of the game. They felt that a balance is needed and that some sports conditioning coaches need to be educated and to plan sessions. The players felt that there is a perception that sports conditioning is just about lifting heavy weights, but there needs to be more awareness about its value in injury prevention and increasing mobility.

In Workshop D, players also discussed sports conditioning, which many had started at age 16. The type of sports conditioning appears to vary by county: some using team-based sports conditioning while in others players might do it with a trainer in a gym. Some players said that they do not like doing sports conditioning on their own in a gym because they prefer working in a team environment.

On the positive side, players felt that sports conditioning improved the game and that players were faster – sports conditioning means that they know that they are

doing something to improve themselves, particularly in terms of injury prevention. Players discussed how they could see the weights that they lift going up, which they viewed positively because it was a sign that they were getting stronger; and said that the cost of gym access was covered by the team's County Board. Some players said that some sports conditioning coaches and the team's management do not communicate; and that, for some teams, football was about 'running' sports conditioning.

### ***Consideration Given to Post-Playing Days***

In Workshop A, younger players had not considered their post-playing days. For those that had (the older players), the role of their club was going to be very important. Specifically, the players would be able to give more time to their club: once they managed to avoid serious injury, they envisaged playing for four to five years. They also felt that they would be able to volunteer more within their club. They were looking forward to the playing time that they would have with their club because, although it would be competitive, there would not be as much pressure as there was with inter-county – playing with their county is almost year-round, but this would not be the case with their club. They were also looking forward to playing other types of sport: golf, triathlons, etc. The players indicated that there would be a 'void' in some players' lives on their retirement from inter-county: they felt that this was individual-dependent and that 'balance' was very important during a player's inter-county career.

### B.3 RESPONSES RATES BY CODE AND PLAYING LEVEL

**TABLE B.3.1 SURVEY OF SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS 2016 (SSICP-2016) QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE OVERVIEW: CODE AND NATIONAL DIVISION/CHAMPIONSHIP BREAKDOWN**

	Response Rate
<b>Code</b>	
Football	52.0
Hurling	55.4
<b>2016 National Football League Structure</b>	
Division 1	51.3
Division 2	52.6
Division 3	51.3
Division 4	52.7
<b>Hurling Championship Structure</b>	
MacCarthy Cup	57.9
Christy Ring	53.0
Nicky Rackard	50.5
Lory Meagher	59.0

Source: Authors' own calculations.

### B.4 SSICP-2016 QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM NON-RESPONSE

**TABLE B.4.1 SSICP-2016 QUESTIONNAIRE VARIABLES: ITEM NON-RESPONSE (PER CENT)**

	Variable	Non-response (%)
	Final sample	1,037
	<b>Chapter 4</b>	
	Time allocated to:	
1	Professional commitments	3.8
2	GAA commitments	3.8
3	Travel to and from inter-county training	3.8
4	Gear and/or food preparation	3.8
5	Other (including time spent with family, partner, friends and relaxing/downtime)	3.8
6	Sleeping	3.9
7	Sports conditioning session: match week	4.6
8	Sports conditioning session: non-match week	4.6
9	Travel to and from inter-county sports conditioning session	4.5
10	Individually instigated training session: match week	4.5
11	Individually instigated training session: non-match week	4.5
12	Other club team: match week	4.0

	Variable	Non-response (%)
13	Other club team: non-match week	4.0
14	Number of training sessions:	
15	Field-based: match week	4.1
16	Field-based: non-match week	4.1
17	Sports conditioning: match week	4.1
18	Sports conditioning: non-match week	4.1
19	Individually instigated: match week	4.6
20	Individually instigated: non-match week	4.6
21	Other club team: match week	4.0
22	Other club team: non-match week	4.0
23	Number of Gaelic teams played with during the 2016 season	0.2
24	Time commitments during the 2016 pre-season	4.1
25	Time commitments during the 2016 national league	4.1
26	Time off from Gaelic games during the 2016 season	4.1
27	Amount of time off from Gaelic games during the 2016 season	0.2
28	Level of satisfaction with training to game ratio during the 2016 pre-season	3.5
29	Level of satisfaction with training to game ratio during the 2016 national league	3.5
30	Level of satisfaction with training to game ratio during the 2016 championship	3.5
<b>Chapter 5</b>		
1	Sustained injury during 2016 season	2.9
2	Period of time absent from training/playing due to injury	0.0
3	Period of time absent from work/college due to injury	0.2
4	Played inter-county match when injured	3.2
5	Played club match when injured	3.2
6	Trained with inter-county when injured	3.2
7	Trained with club when injured	3.2
8	Feel pressurised to play senior inter-county game when injured	3.2
9	Received medication to assist to play inter-county match while injured	0.7
10	Received medication to assist to play club match while injured	0.4
11	Final decision-maker on playing senior inter-county match when injured	3.0
12	WHO-5 well-being statement 1	3.2
13	WHO-5 well-being statement 2	3.5
14	WHO-5 well-being statement 3	3.6
15	WHO-5 well-being statement 4	3.4
16	WHO-5 well-being statement 5	3.5
17	Life satisfaction measure	3.3
18	Who player would feel comfortable approaching if had emotional or mental health difficulty	3.0
19	Senior inter-county training, playing and related commitments take up a large amount of time	4.5
20	Other life areas players would like to spend more time on	0.0
21	Main downsides of playing inter-county	0.6 (min)–0.9 (max)

	Variable	Non-response (%)
22	What player has reduced/given up involvement in from playing inter-county	0.5 (min)–1.3 (max)
23	Too much effort is demanded from us as players	1.0
24	Working conditions associated with paid job need to be flexible to play inter-county	1.2
25	Find it easy to incorporate other hobbies/leisure activities into my life	1.2
26	Have to watch behaviour in public	1.3
27	Enjoy taking part in voluntary activities that promote Gaelic games	1.2
28	Glad made the choice to play inter-county	1.0
29	How playing inter-county has benefited player in their life	0.6
30	Most important aspects of inter-county experience	0.1
31	Continue to play senior inter-county (in 2017 season)	0.4
32	Main reasons for stopping	0.0
	<b>Chapter 6</b>	
1	Playing for my club team has played a big role in my development as a Gaelic player	3.6
2	My club manager/management team expect too much from me when I return to play with club	3.6
3	My club teammates are resentful towards me when I return to play for the club	3.7
4	My club is proud I represent the club on the county team	3.6
5	My inter-county commitments prevent me from socialising with my club teammates	3.6
6	My club management team is understanding when my inter-county commitments restrict me from participating in club training/matches	3.7
7	There is a respectful understanding, and good communication, between my club and county management teams regarding my availability to participate for both teams	3.8
8	Amount of time spent with club team compared to county during the 2016 pre-season	3.6
9	Amount of time spent with club team compared to county during the 2016 national league	3.6
10	Amount of time spent with club team compared to county during the 2016 championship	3.6
11	Players' views on wanting to spend more time with club if at a cost to their personal inter-county success	3.8
	<b>Chapter 7</b>	
1	Why do you play inter-county hurling/football?	0.2
2	Withdraw from inter-county if not enjoying the experience of playing at that level	0.9
3	What players would like to see more emphasis on	1.4

Source: Authors' own calculations.



## B.5 2016 NATIONAL LEAGUE FOOTBALL TEAMS AND CHAMPIONSHIP CUP HURLING TEAMS

**TABLE B.5.1 2016 NATIONAL LEAGUE FOOTBALL TEAMS**

Division 1	Division 2	Division 3	Division 4
Cork	Armagh	Clare	Antrim
Donegal	Cavan	Kildare	Carlow
Down	Derry	Limerick	Leitrim
Dublin	Fermanagh	Longford	London*
Kerry	Galway	Offaly	Louth
Mayo	Laois	Sligo	Waterford
Monaghan	Meath	Tipperary	Wexford
Roscommon	Tyrone	Westmeath	Wicklow

Note: \* Not included in the study.

**TABLE B.5.2 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP CUP HURLING TEAMS**

MacCarthy Cup	MacCarthy Cup	Christy Ring Cup	Nicky Rackard Cup	Lory Meagher Cup
Carlow	Limerick	Antrim	Armagh	Lancashire*
Clare	Offaly	Derry	Donegal	Leitrim
Cork	Tipperary	Down	Fermanagh	Louth
Dublin	Waterford	Kildare	Longford	Sligo
Galway	Westmeath	London*	Mayo	Warwickshire*
Kerry	Wexford	Meath	Monaghan	
Kilkenny		Roscommon	Tyrone	
Laois		Wicklow		

Note: \* Not included in the study.



## APPENDIX C: CHAPTER 5 SUPPLEMENTARY WORK

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### C.1 TWENTY-FOUR HOUR FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY ANALYSIS: DATA CHECKS AND RESTRICTIONS

#### C.1.1 Calculation of the time allocated to an organised inter-county 'field-based' training session

Nine hundred and ninety-eight 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the number of hours that they allocated to a field-based training session during the 2016 championship (late May/June). The response distribution ran from 0 to 12 hours. Twelve players gave above 6 hours in response to this question, ranging from 6.5 to 12 hours; while 11 players gave less than an hour, going from zero to 0.75 hours.

In deciding the appropriate hourly range to use when analysing the average duration of a field-based training session, we started by omitting the aforementioned upper and lower bound response players, of whom there were 23, from the analysis in order to identify the impact of their exclusion on the 'average' number of hours allocated by senior inter-county players to a field-based training session. The original average duration figure of 2.872 (2.9) hours fell to 2.835 (2.8) hours when these players were removed from the analysis.

In a second step, we also removed players who indicated that they spent 6 hours on a field-based training session. There were 12 such players and their omission further reduced the average duration figure to 2.798 (2.8) hours.

Given that the omission of these groups of players had minimal impact on the average amount of time that 2016 inter-county players devoted to a field-based training session – the average duration fell from 2.9 hours to 2.8 hours – and to allow for the fact that some players might be engaging in significant prehab/rehab work, or might not be working and could commit extra time on a field-based training day to honing their skills, we took the decision to omit only the extreme responses from the time allocated to a field-based training analysis; specifically, players who indicated that they spent zero hours on a field-based training session (4) and those who spent 10–12 hours training (3). The exclusion of these extreme responses (7) resulted in the average duration of time that 2016 senior inter-county players spent on a field-based training session falling from 2.872 (2.9) hours to 2.858 (2.9) hours. Thus, the impact of the omission of the extreme responses from this analysis was minimal. Nevertheless, these players who provided what appear to be extreme responses were excluded from the calculation of the average duration of a 2016 senior inter-county field-based training session (Chapter 5, and

also the detailed hourly breakdown (Chapter 5). Consequently, these training duration analyses were based on the responses of 991 2016 senior inter-county players.<sup>151</sup>

### **C.1.2 Calculation of the time allocated to travelling to and from an organised inter-county ‘field-based’ training session**

Nine hundred and ninety-eight 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the number of hours that they spent travelling to and from an organised inter-county field-based training session during the 2016 championship (late May/June). The response distribution ran from 0 to 10 hours.

Six players gave above 6 hours in response to this question, ranging from 6.5 to 10 hours: we omitted three players who spent 7 and above hours travelling to and from training.

Seven players gave zero hours in response to this question. It is possible that some players live very near where they train. However, we omitted four of the seven zero-hour travel players as they appeared to be outlier responses on the basis of their responses across all of the time questions.

When we excluded these seven players, the average amount of time spent travelling to and from an inter-county field-based training fell from 2.081 (2.1) hours for all respondents (998) to 2.073 (2.1) hours. Thus, the omission of these outlying responses made no difference to the original average travel time calculated for all responses: 2.1 hours. Nevertheless, these seven players’ responses were excluded from the calculation of the average duration of time spent travelling to and from an inter-county training session (Chapter 5), and to the detailed hourly breakdown (Section 4.2.3). Consequently, the travel time analyses were based on the responses of 991 2016 senior inter-county players.<sup>152</sup>

### **C.1.3 Calculation of the time allocated to food and gear preparation on an organised inter-county ‘field-based’ training session**

Nine hundred and ninety-eight 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the amount of time that they devoted to gear and/or food preparation on an organised inter-county field-based training session during the 2016 Championship (late May/June). The response distribution ran from 0 to 20

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<sup>151</sup> The responses were weighted to ensure that the results were representative of all 2016 senior inter-county players.

<sup>152</sup> The responses were weighted to ensure that the results were representative of all 2016 senior inter-county players.

hours.

One player indicated that he spent 20 hours preparing his gear and food on an inter-county field-based training day, while four players gave responses of greater than five hours. These five players were omitted from this inter-county commitments time allocation examination as, based on their responses to the various time commitment questions, they looked like outlier cases. When we removed these players, the average amount of time allocated to food/gear preparation fell from 1.158 (1.2) hours to 1.119 (1.1) hours; thus, there was very little change in the time spent on gear and/or food preparation with this data restriction.

Twenty-six players indicated that they spent zero hours preparing food and/or gear on an inter-county field-based training day. While these players may have family and/or partners who help them prepare for their training by undertaking these tasks, we took the decision to assume that players spend some time on a training day on gear and/or food preparation (making sure that they have their correct boots/hurl etc.) and, therefore, allocated these 26 players a minimum of 0.1 hours to undertaking these tasks. This data adjustment had no impact on the average amount of time allocated by senior inter-county players to food and/or gear preparation on an inter-county training day.

Given the aforementioned data restrictions, the gear/food preparation time analyses presented in the report are based on the responses from 993 2016 senior inter-county players.<sup>153</sup>

#### **C.1.4 Calculation of the time allocated to professional commitments on an organised inter-county ‘field-based’ training session**

Nine hundred and ninety-eight 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the amount of time that they devoted to their professional commitments on an organised inter-county field-based training session during the 2016 Championship (late May/June). The response distribution ran from 0 to 24 hours.

One player who indicated that he spent 24 hours on his professional commitments was excluded from the analysis as his response would imply that he did not partake in an inter-county field-based training session.

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<sup>153</sup> The responses were weighted to ensure that the results were representative of all 2016 senior inter-county players.

Eighteen players gave a zero response to this time commitment question. This is a feasible response given that some players may be unemployed or students on holidays and not working during the time period examined (late May/June 2016). Thus, these players were retained in the analysis.

Eighty players indicated that they devoted more than 10 hours to their professional commitments on an inter-county training day. We examined the responses provided by these players to the other time commitment questions and found that three of the players indicated that they slept for 2 hours or less on an inter-county training night. These three players were excluded from the professional time commitment analysis. The responses provided by the remaining 77 players to the other time commitment questions seemed reasonable. Thus, these players were retained in this analysis. This means that the professional time commitment analyses presented in the report are based on the responses provided by 994 2016 senior inter-county players.<sup>154</sup>

#### **C.1.5 Calculation of the time allocated to ‘other’ commitments on an organised inter-county ‘field-based’ training session**

Nine hundred and ninety-eight 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the amount of time that they devoted to ‘other’ commitments on an organised inter-county field-based training session during the 2016 championship (late May/June). This commitment category included time spent with family, partner, friends and relaxing/downtime. The response distribution ran from 0 to 24 hours.

Two players indicated that they spent 24 hours on their ‘other’ commitments on an inter-county field-based training day, one player gave a response of 20 hours to this question, while 13 indicated that they spent between 10 and 16.25 hours on ‘other’ commitments on a field-based training day during the 2016 championship (late May/June). The two players that gave a response of 24 hours to this question were excluded from the analysis. After examining the responses provided to the other time commitment questions for the other aforementioned players, those that indicated that they spent 16.25 and 20 hours were excluded as well, as their responses to the other time commitment questions revealed that they were outliers. When these four players were excluded from the analysis, the average time allocated to ‘other’ commitments fell from 2.47 (2.5) hours to 2.39 (2.4) hours. Thus, the impact of this data restriction was very small.

Seventy-five players gave a zero response to this time commitment question.

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<sup>154</sup> The responses were weighted to ensure that the results were representative of all 2016 senior inter-county players.

Between professional commitments, sleep, travelling to and from training and training itself, it is possible that some players are getting to spend no time on other commitments that they might have, including their family, partner or friends or general downtime. Given this, these players were kept in the analysis.

This means that the 'other' time commitment examinations presented in the report are based on the responses provided by 994 2016 senior inter-county players.<sup>155</sup>

#### **C.1.6 Calculation of the time allocated to sleep on an organised inter-county 'field-based' training session**

Nine hundred and ninety-seven 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the amount of time that they devoted to sleep on an organised inter-county field-based training session day during the 2016 championship (late May/June). The response distribution ran from 0 to 12 hours.

Five players indicated that they spent 0 hours sleeping on an inter-county field-based training day, while 10 other players spent 3 hours or less. These 15 players were omitted from the analysis as their responses to the other time commitment questions suggested that they were outliers. When these 15 players were excluded from the analysis, the average time allocated to sleep increased from 7.48 (7.5) hours to 7.56 (7.6) hours. As with all other data adjustments described in this appendix, the impact of this data adjustment was very small.

Seven players devoted between 10.25 and 12 hours to sleep on an inter-county field-based training day. These time allocations to sleep are feasible. However, as a sensitivity check we examined the responses that these players provided to the other time commitment questions. All their other time responses looked reasonable; therefore, these players were retained in the analysis.

After the data adjustment outlined above, the sleep analyses presented in the report are based on the responses provided by 982 2016 senior inter-county players.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> The responses were weighted to ensure that the results were representative of all 2016 senior inter-county players.

<sup>156</sup> The responses were weighted to ensure that the results were representative of all 2016 senior inter-county players.

## **C.2 NON-FIELD-BASED SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING DAY ANALYSIS: DATA CHECKS AND RESTRICTIONS**

### **C.2.1 Calculation of the time allocated to travelling to and from an organised inter-county 'non-field-based' sports conditioning training session**

Nine hundred and ninety 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the amount of time that they devoted to travelling to and from an organised inter-county non-field-based sports conditioning training session during the 2016 championship (late May/June). The response distribution ran from 0 to 100 hours.

There were four other players who provided sport conditioning duration time information. In order to retain these four players in the sports conditioning analyses, their travel time for a sports conditioning session was recoded from missing to zero.

Forty-two players gave above 6 hours in response to this question, ranging from 6.5 to 100 hours. Two of these players' inter-county sports conditioning travel times equated to their field-based training travel times. Thus, no adjustments were made to these two players' sports conditioning travel time responses. For the remaining forty players, their sports conditioning travel time exceeded their inter-county field-based travel time. This would be unusual; thus, these forty players' sports conditioning travel time was recoded to their field-based training travel time. This adjustment was undertaken on the assumption that these players travelled to their home county base for their sports conditioning training session. Although not all players travel back to their home base for their sports conditioning training session, this was the best assumption to make in this situation given that these players indicated that they were travelling relatively long distances. In addition, we would have had to exclude these players from the analysis if this assumption was not made. As a sensitivity check, however, we excluded these 40 players to see what impact this had on the average travel time to and from a sports conditioning training session. The average time fell from 1.830 (1.8) hours to 1.785 (1.8) hours; thus, omitting these players had only a marginal impact. This sensitivity check reinforces the decision taken to retain these players in the sports conditioning travel time analyses and to allocate them their field-based training travel time.

For the inter-county field-based travel time analysis, we omitted players who spent 7 and above hours travelling to and from their field-based training. This was the situation for one of the 40 players after we recoded their sports conditioning training travel time to their field-based training travel time; thus, this player was excluded from the analysis. When we undertook this adjustment, it made no



difference to the average time players were spending travelling to and from their sports conditioning training session: the average fell from 1.830 hours to 1.826 hours; thus, it remained at 1.8 hours.

Seventeen players gave zero in response to their sports conditioning travel time. It is possible that some players live near where they undertake their sports conditioning training session; thus, no amendments were made to these 17 players' sports conditioning travel time information.

Based on the adjustments outlined above, the sports conditioning travel time analyses presented in the report are based on the responses provided by 993 2016 senior inter-county players.

### **C.2.2 Calculation of the time allocated to an organised inter-county 'non-field-based' sports conditioning training session during a championship 'match week' and a 'non-match week'**

Nine hundred and eighty-nine 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the amount of time that they devoted to an organised inter-county non-field-based sports conditioning training session during a 2016 Championship inter-county match week and a non-match week (late May/June). This is four<sup>157</sup> fewer than the number of players that we have sports conditioning training travel time information for. In order to retain these four players in the sports conditioning analyses, we calculated the average amount of time that each of these four players' teams devoted to a sports conditioning training session during a match week and a non-match week, with any outlier responses excluded,<sup>158</sup> and allocated these team averages to the four players. Thus, the sports conditioning session duration analyses that are presented in the report are based on 994 2016 senior inter-county players.

The response distribution on the duration of a sports conditioning session during a match week ran from 0 to 72, while it was 0 to 80 for the non-match week responses.

For the match week responses, 63 players gave above 4 hours for the duration of their sports conditioning session, while 79 gave above 5 hours for the duration of this type of training session during a non-match week. A sports conditioning session that is above 4 hours during a match week does not seem plausible, while a session above 5 hours during a non-match week is not credible either. We

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<sup>157</sup> Originally five, but four once we made the data adjustment discussed in C.2.1.

<sup>158</sup> Additional details on this adjustment are available from the authors on request.

therefore identified the team averages for the players that provided these extreme responses (63 players for the match week and 79 for the non-match week)<sup>159</sup> and allocated these players the team average values for the amount of time allocated to a sports conditioning session: these team averages were derived with outlier responses removed.<sup>160</sup>

Sports conditioning sessions that are 4 hours long during a match week and 5 hours during a non-match week seem lengthy as well, but we kept these responses in the analyses as the number of players providing these values was relatively small.<sup>161</sup>

After these adjustments, the response distribution ran from 0 to 4 hours for the duration of a sports conditioning session during a match week and from 0 to 5 hours for the duration of this type of session during a non-match week.

For the duration of a match week sports conditioning session, 50 players gave zero in their response: these zero responses are plausible given that they relate to a match week. For the duration of a sports conditioning session during a non-match week, 30 players gave a response of zero. Of these 30 players, 10 gave a response of zero for their sports conditioning travel time. Thus, these players were left coded zero for their response to this sports conditioning duration question. The other 20 players who gave a response of zero for the duration of their sports conditioning session during a non-match week provided travel time information for such a session. One would assume that these 20 players were doing some type of team sports conditioning during an inter-county non-match week; thus, these 20 players were given their teams' average time for a sports conditioning session during a non-match week: outlier responses were excluded from the calculation of these players' team averages.

### **C.3 EXAMINATION OF THE NUMBER OF SENIOR INTER-COUNTY TRAINING SESSIONS DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP**

#### **C.3.1 Identification of the number of field-based training sessions during an inter-county championship match week**

Nine hundred and ninety-four 2016 senior inter-county players provided

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<sup>159</sup> Thirty-nine team averages had to be derived for the 63 players that provided extreme responses for a sports conditioning session during a match week, while 43 team averages had to be derived for the 79 non-match week extreme responses.

<sup>160</sup> Additional details on this adjustment are available from the authors on request.

<sup>161</sup> The average value of a sports conditioning session during a match week fell slightly, from 1.5 to 1.4 hours, when those that provided 4 hours were excluded from the analysis; the average duration of this type of training session during a non-match week fell from 2.0 to 1.9 hours when those that provided 5 hours were excluded.

information on the number of field-based training sessions that they undertook during a 2016 championship (late May/June) match week. The response distribution ran from 0 to 20 sessions per week.

One player indicated zero field-based training sessions during an inter-county championship match week; nine players indicated one session; 40 players four sessions; four players five sessions; one player seven sessions; one player eight sessions, and one player 20 sessions. The number of training sessions undertaken by the level (McCarthy Cup, Division 1 footballers, etc.) at which these 57 players played were examined, as were the team responses, and these players' responses were then recoded according to the playing level/team responses. For example, three Nicky Rackard players indicated one field-based training session during a senior inter-county match week, two players four sessions, and one player five sessions. Based on the responses provided by the remaining Nicky Rackard players, the majority undertook either two or three field-based training sessions during a senior inter-county match week. Given these Nicky Rackard Cup player responses, the three one-session Nicky Rackard players were recoded to two sessions, and the two four-session and the one five-session Nicky Rackard players were recoded to three sessions. A similar adjustment was made for five Christy Ring Cup players, seven Lory Meagher Cup players, 13 MacCarthy Cup players, ten Division 1 footballers, four Division 2 footballers, eight Division 3 footballers and four Division 4 footballers. After these adjustments, the response distribution ran from two to four sessions per week.

### **C.3.2 Identification of the number of non-field-based sports conditioning training sessions during an inter-county championship match week**

Nine hundred and ninety-four 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the number of non-field-based sports conditioning training sessions that they undertook during a 2016 championship (late May/June) match week. The response distribution ran from zero to six sessions per week.

Forty-one players indicated that they undertook three organised inter-county sports conditioning training sessions during an inter-county championship match week; seven players said four sessions; two players five sessions; and one player six sessions. We took the decision to make no adjustment to the three-session responses (41 players), while the remaining ten players who gave four sessions or above were recoded to three sessions. No adjustments were made to the zero response cases (83 players) as it is feasible that some 2016 senior players did not undertake an organised inter-county sports conditioning training session during a match week. After the aforementioned response amendments, the response distribution for the number of organised inter-county sports conditioning training sessions during a championship match week ran from zero to three.

### **C.3.3 Identification of the number of field-based training sessions during an inter-county championship non-match week**

Nine hundred and ninety-four 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the number of field-based training sessions that they undertook during a 2016 championship (late May/June) non-match week. The response distribution ran from 0 to 7 sessions per week.

Three players indicated zero field-based training sessions during an inter-county championship non-match week; 17 one session; four players five sessions; two players six sessions, and one player seven sessions. The zero- and one-session responses, of which there were 20, were recoded to two sessions; the five- to seven-session responses were recoded to four sessions. After these adjustments, the response distribution ran from 2 to 4 for the number of field-based training sessions that 2016 players undertook during a championship non-match week.

### **C.3.4 Identification of the number of non-field-based sports conditioning training sessions during an inter-county championship non-match week**

Nine hundred and ninety-four 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the number of non-field-based sports conditioning training sessions that they undertook during a 2016 championship (late May/June) non-match week. The response distribution ran from zero to six sessions per week.

Thirteen players indicated that they undertook four organised inter-county sports conditioning training sessions during an inter-county championship non-match week; three players five sessions; and two players six sessions. These 18 players were recoded to three sessions per week. No adjustments were made to the zero response cases (47 players) as it is feasible that some 2016 senior players did not undertake an organised inter-county sports conditioning training session during a championship non-match week. After the aforementioned amendment, the response distribution for the number of organised inter-county sports conditioning training sessions during a championship non-match week ran from zero to three.

#### **C.4 EXAMINATION OF THE NUMBER OF TRAINING SESSIONS AND/OR GAMES WITH 'OTHER GAELIC TEAMS' DURING THE 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP**

##### **C.4.1 Identification of the number of training sessions and/or games with other Gaelic teams during an inter-county championship match week**

Nine hundred and eighty-six 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the number of sessions that they undertook with other Gaelic teams that they were involved with during a 2016 inter-county championship (late May/June) match week.

Ten additional players provided information on the teams that they were involved with during the 2016 inter-county championship, but not the specific number of trainings/games during an inter-county match week. Given that these players had provided some information in relation to this matter, the decision was taken to keep these players in the analysis and, on the basis that the majority of senior inter-county players do not undertake any training sessions/games with other Gaelic teams that they are involved with the week of an inter-county championship match,<sup>162</sup> these ten players were given responses of zero for this question. Thus, the inclusion of these ten players increased the number of responses to this question to 996.

There were 54 players who gave responses for the number of training sessions/games that they undertook with other Gaelic teams that they were involved with during an inter-county championship match week, but then indicated zero in response to the length of such sessions/matches. These 54 players were recoded to zero for this number of sessions information.

The response distribution for this question ran from zero to ten sessions per week (Monday to Sunday). Forty-one players indicated that they trained with their other Gaelic teams between five and ten times during an inter-county match week. A response to this question of above two sessions/games the week of an inter-county match might not seem plausible. However, 20 per cent of players indicated that they trained/played games with the other Gaelic teams that they were involved with during an inter-county match week. For this reason, players who gave responses of three or four sessions per week were retained, while the 41 players that gave responses of five to ten training sessions/games were allocated the 'average' response to this question, i.e. the average number of trainings/matches

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<sup>162</sup> Based on the information collected in the SSICP-2016 questionnaire, 67 per cent of 2016 players.

players partook in with their other Gaelic teams the week of an inter-county match. With the exclusion of the zero response players from this calculation, the average number of trainings/games with other Gaelic teams the week of an inter-county championship match was 2.1 sessions. Thus, these 41 players were allocated two sessions in response to this question.

#### **C.4.2 Identification of the number of training sessions and/or games with other Gaelic teams during an inter-county championship non-match week**

Nine hundred and eighty-six 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the number of sessions that they undertook with other Gaelic teams that they were involved with during a 2016 inter-county championship (late May/June) non-match week.

There were 10 additional players who provided information on the teams that they were involved with during the 2016 inter-county championship, but not the specific number of trainings/games during an inter-county non-match week. Given that these players had provided some information in relation to this matter, the decision was taken to keep these players in the analysis and they were recoded to zero for this question. The inclusion of these ten players increased the number of responses to this question to 996.

There were 50 players who gave responses for the number of training sessions/games that they undertook with other Gaelic teams that they were involved with during an inter-county championship non-match week, but then indicated zero in response to the length of such sessions/matches. Given this, these 50 players were recoded to zero for this question.

The response distribution for this question ran from zero to eight sessions per week (Monday to Sunday). Thirty-five players indicated that they trained with their other Gaelic teams between six and eight times during an inter-county championship non-match week. A response to this question of above three sessions/games during weeks in which inter-county players did not have a game might not seem possible. However, 15 per cent of players indicated that they trained/played games with their other Gaelic teams more than three times during an inter-county non-match week. Given this, players who gave responses of four or five sessions per week were retained, while the 35 players that gave responses of six to eight training sessions/games were allocated the 'average' response to this question i.e., the average number of trainings/matches players partook in with their other Gaelic teams during weeks when they did not have an inter-county match. With the exclusion of the zero response players from this calculation, the average number of trainings/games with other Gaelic teams during weeks when there was no inter-

county championship match was 2.1 sessions. Thus, these 35 players were allocated two sessions in response to this question.

#### **C.4.3 Calculation of the duration of other Gaelic teams' training sessions and/or games during an inter-county championship match week**

Nine hundred and eighty-six 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the duration of sessions that they undertook with other Gaelic teams that they were involved with during a 2016 inter-county championship (late May/June) match week.

The ten players discussed in Sections C.4.1 and C.4.2 who provided information on the teams that they were involved with during the 2016 inter-county championship, but not information on the number of trainings/games with their other Gaelic teams or the duration of such sessions/games, were retained in this analysis and coded to zero. Thus, the inclusion of these ten players increased the number of responses to this question to 996.

Six hundred and seventy-one 2016 senior inter-county players indicated that they did not train or play with their other Gaelic team the week of an inter-county game. Of these, 68 players gave training/match time information. These 68 players' responses were recoded to zero.

The response distribution for this training/match duration question ran from zero to 20. Zero time is possible, given that the question related to an inter-county match week.

Sixty-four players indicated that the duration of the training session/game with their other Gaelic teams during an inter-county match week was between 3.5 and 20 hours. Of these, 39 gave duration information of between five and 20 hours. These are extreme values; however, it is not possible to allocate these players their inter-county team average response to this question as every county team is made up of a variety of club players, who spend different lengths of time training/playing with their club teams. Given this, these extreme responses (39) were excluded from the calculation of the 'average' session/game duration with players' other Gaelic teams,<sup>163</sup> while for the 'time breakdown' analysis these players are in the 'greater than 3 hours' category.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Players who did not undertake a session/game with their other Gaelic team the week of an inter-county match (671) were excluded from the average analysis as well. Thus, this average time analysis was based on 286 player responses.

<sup>164</sup> Analysis based on 996 responses.

#### **C.4.4 Calculation of the duration of other Gaelic teams' training sessions and/or games during an inter-county championship non-match week**

Nine hundred and eighty-six 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the duration of sessions that they undertook with other Gaelic teams that they were involved with during a 2016 inter-county championship (late May/June) match week.

The ten players discussed in Sections C.4.1 and C.4.2 who provided information on the teams that they were involved with during the 2016 inter-county championship, but not information on the number of trainings/games with their other Gaelic teams or the duration of such sessions/games, were retained in this analysis and coded to zero. Thus, the inclusion of these ten players increased the number of responses to this question to 996.

Three hundred and ninety-two 2016 senior inter-county players indicated that they did not train or play with their other Gaelic team the weeks when they had no inter-county championship game. Of these, 59 players gave training/match time information. These 59 players' responses were recoded to zero.

The response distribution for this training/match duration question ran from zero to 30. Zero time is possible, as some players do not train/play with their other Gaelic teams even in the weeks when they do not have an inter-county championship match.

Fifty-seven players indicated that the duration of the training session/game with their other Gaelic teams during an inter-county non-match week was between 5 and 30 hours. These are extreme values, but it is not possible to allocate these players their inter-county team average response to this question as every county team is made up of a variety of club players, who spend different lengths of time training/playing with their club teams. Therefore these extreme responses (57) were excluded from the calculation of the 'average' session/game duration with players' other Gaelic teams during a non-match week,<sup>165</sup> while for the 'time breakdown' analysis these players are in the 'greater than 3 hours' category.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Players who did not undertake a session/game with their other Gaelic team the weeks when they did not have an inter-county match (392) were excluded from the average analysis as well. Thus, this average time analysis was based on 547 player responses.

<sup>166</sup> Analysis based on 996 responses.



## **C.5 EXAMINATION OF THE NUMBER OF ‘INDIVIDUALLY INSTIGATED’ TRAINING SESSIONS DURING THE 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP**

### **C.5.1 Identification of the number of individually instigated training sessions during an inter-county championship match week**

Nine hundred and eighty-nine 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the number of individually instigated (i.e. self-motivated) training sessions that they undertook during a 2016 inter-county championship (late May/June) match week.

Twelve players indicated that they undertook an individually instigated training session during an inter-county championship match week, but then responded zero for the duration of such a training session. These 12 players were recoded to zero for this match week session question.

The response distribution for this question ran from zero to ten sessions. Given that this self-motivated session information related to a senior inter-county championship match week, one would expect some players to indicate that they undertook no such sessions during that week. In this case, there were 206 such players.<sup>167</sup>

Twenty-three players gave responses of five to ten individually instigated training sessions during a senior inter-county championship match week. This number of sessions the week of an inter-county championship match does not seem plausible; thus, these 23 players were allocated the ‘average’ number of individually instigated training sessions that were undertaken during a senior inter-county championship match week. With the 23 outliers and the zero responses removed, the average number of individually instigated training sessions was calculated to be 1.5. Given that this information related to an inter-county championship match week, this average figure was rounded down to 1 session per week for these 23 players.

### **C.5.2 Identification of the number of individually instigated training sessions during an inter-county championship non-match week**

Nine hundred and eighty-nine 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the number of individually instigated (i.e. self-motivated) training sessions that they undertook during a 2016 inter-county championship (late

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<sup>167</sup> 218 when we take account of the 12 players who had their responses recoded to zero.

May/June) non-match week.

Fifteen players indicated that they undertook individually instigated training sessions during inter-county championship non-match weeks, but then responded zero for the duration of such sessions. These 15 players were recoded to zero for this non-match week session question.

The response distribution for this question ran from zero to 12 sessions. One hundred and twelve players<sup>168</sup> indicated that they undertook zero self-motivated training sessions during weeks in which there was no inter-county match. Given the time of year that the information was captured for – late May/June – some players may have taken the decision to abstain from such training during this inter-county championship time period. Thus, these responses were not amended.

Twenty-one players gave responses to this question of six to 12 such sessions. Even though the information related to an inter-county championship non-match week, this quantity of individual trainings, on top of the players' inter-county training (field-based and sports conditioning), seems to be a little excessive. Given this, these 21 players were allocated the average number of individually instigated training sessions during an inter-county championship non-match week: with the extreme and zero responses removed, this average session information was calculated to be 1.9 sessions. Thus, these 21 players were allocated 2 self-motivated training sessions during an inter-county championship non-match week.

### **C.5.3 Calculation of the duration of individually instigated training sessions during an inter-county championship match week**

Nine hundred and ninety 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the duration of their individually instigated (i.e. self-motivated) training sessions during a 2016 inter-county championship (late May/June) match week.

Thirty-nine players indicated that they undertook no individually instigated training sessions the week of an inter-county championship match, but then proceeded to give session duration information. These 39 players were recoded to zero for this question.

Another player who gave a response to this session duration information was 'missing' for the number of such sessions question. This player was recoded to missing for this session duration question. This resulted in this specific analysis

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<sup>168</sup> 127 when the previously mentioned 15 players were included.

being based on 989 players.

The response distribution for this question ran from zero to 50. Zero session duration time responses are possible, given that the responses relate to an inter-county championship match week.

Twenty-nine players indicated that they spent between 5 and 50 hours on an individually instigated training session the week of an inter-county match. It was not possible to allocate 'team averages' to the players that provided these extreme responses, which we did for the organised inter-county sports conditioning session duration questions, as the sessions being examined here are individually determined. Given this, these 29 players were excluded from all the individually instigated session 'average duration' analyses,<sup>169</sup> and were categorised as 'four hours and above' for the 'time breakdown' analyses.

#### **C.5.4 Calculation of the duration of individually instigated training sessions during an inter-county championship non-match week**

Nine hundred and ninety 2016 senior inter-county players provided information on the duration of their individually instigated (i.e. self-motivated) training sessions during a 2016 inter-county championship (late May/June) non-match week.

Twenty-nine players indicated that they undertook no individually instigated training sessions during weeks in which they had no inter-county championship match, but then proceeded to give session duration information. These 29 players were recoded to zero for this question.

One player gave a response to this session duration information but was 'missing' for the number of such sessions question: this player was recoded to missing for this session duration question. This resulted in this analysis being based on 989 players.

The response distribution for this question ran from zero to 70. Ninety-eight players<sup>170</sup> gave a response of zero to this session duration question, which is feasible on the basis that some players may have chosen not to undertake individually instigated training sessions for the championship time of year that the information related to – late May/June. Thus, these zero responses were not

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<sup>169</sup> With the exclusion of players that did not individually train during an inter-county championship match week (218), this meant that these average duration analyses were based on a sample of 742 players instead of 989.

<sup>170</sup> 127 when the 29 that were recoded to zero are included.

modified or excluded for this analysis.

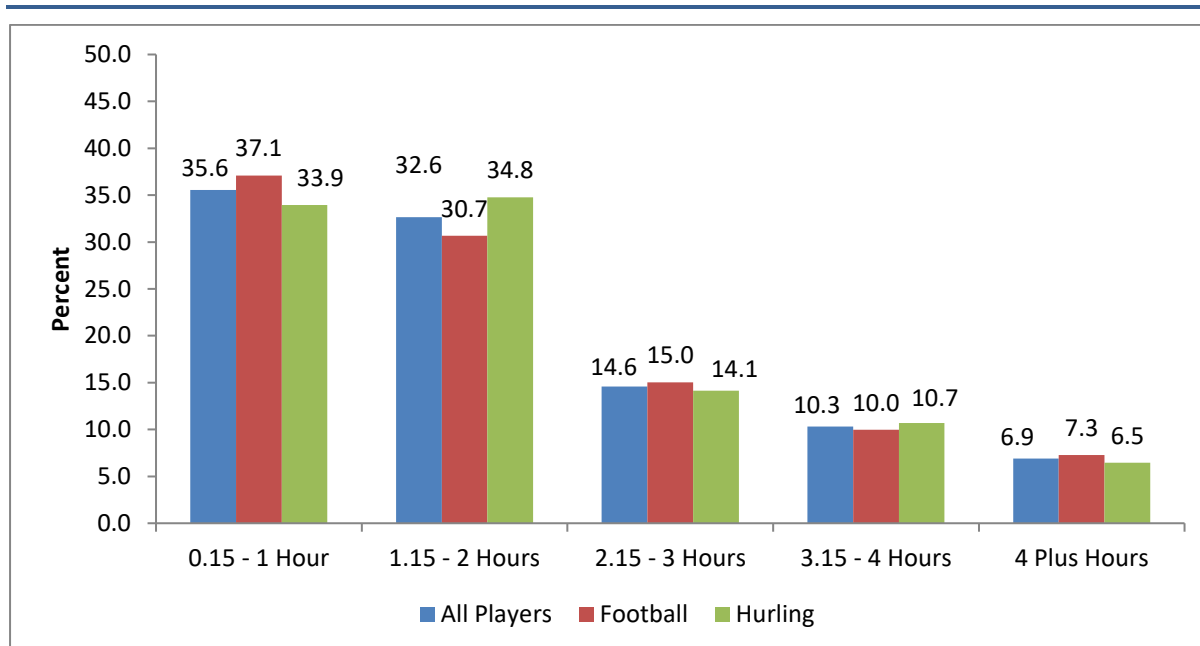
Forty-seven players indicated that they spent between 5 and 70 hours on their individually instigated training sessions during weeks in which they had no inter-county match. As with the outlier responses for the duration of individually instigated training sessions during an inter-county championship match week, it was not possible to allocate ‘team averages’ to these players that provided extreme duration responses to this question, as we did for the organised inter-county sports conditioning session duration questions, as the sessions being examined are individually determined sessions. Given this, these 47 players were excluded from all the individually instigated session ‘average duration’ analyses,<sup>171</sup> and were categorised as ‘four hours and above’ for the ‘time breakdown’ analyses.

## **C.6 EXAMINATION OF TIME SPENT TRAVELLING TO AND FROM A SENIOR INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED TRAINING SESSION**

When we examined the amount of time that 2016 players spent travelling to and from a field-based training session during the 2016 championship (Figure C.6.1), we found that 36 per cent spent up to an hour. Another 33 per cent spent between 1.15 and 2 hours, 15 per cent between 2.15 and 3 hours; 10 per cent between 3.15 and 4 hours, and 7 per cent were spending four hours and above travelling to and from training. There was no difference between hurlers and footballers in this regard.

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<sup>171</sup> With the exclusion of players that did not individually train during an inter-county championship non-match week (127), this meant that these average duration analyses were based on a sample of 815 players instead of 989.

**FIGURE C.6.1 NUMBER OF HOURS SPENT TRAVELLING TO AND FROM AN INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED TRAINING SESSION: OVERALL AND CODE**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

For the most part, 2016 senior inter-county players aged 31 and above spent the least amount of time travelling to and from training (Table C.6.1). Forty-two (37) per cent of this group of players spent up to an hour (between 1 and 2 hours) travelling to and from training. This compares with 32 (33) per cent of players aged 18 to 21; 35 (32) per cent for those aged 22 to 25; and 37 (32) per cent for players aged 26 to 30.

**TABLE C.6.1 NUMBER OF HOURS SPENT TRAVELLING TO AND FROM AN INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED TRAINING SESSION: OVERALL AND AGE GROUP (PER CENT)**

During 2016 Championship Season (late May/June)	All Players	Aged 18-21	Aged 22-25	Aged 26-30	Aged 31+
0.15–1 hour	35.6	32.0	35.2	36.6	42.0
1.15–2 hours	32.6	33.0	31.9	32.1	37.0
2.15–3 hours	14.6	15.0	14.1	15.3	[<14.0]
3.15–4 hours	10.3	13.0	10.9	9.6	*
4+ hours	6.9	[<7.0]	8.0	6.5	*

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

### C.7 EXAMINATION OF TIME DEVOTED TO FOOD AND GEAR PREPARATION ON A SENIOR INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY

Almost three-quarters (73.4 per cent) of 2016 players spent up to and including an hour preparing their gear and/or food on an inter-county field-based training day. Just over a fifth (22 per cent) devoted between one and two hours to this inter-county commitment. As with inter-county training travel, there was no significant difference between hurlers and footballers in relation to this inter-county commitment (Table C.7.1).

**TABLE C.7.1 NUMBER OF HOURS DEVOTED TO GEAR AND/OR FOOD PREPARATION ON AN INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY: OVERALL AND CODE (PER CENT)**

During 2016 Championship Season (late May/June)	All Players	Football	Hurling
<1 hour	32.7	34.0	31.8
1 hour	40.7	43.0	37.9
1.15–2 hours	21.6	20.0	23.1
2+ hours	5.0	[< 4.0]	7.2

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

### C.8 EXAMINATION OF THE DURATION OF SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING AMONG 2016 SENIOR PLAYERS

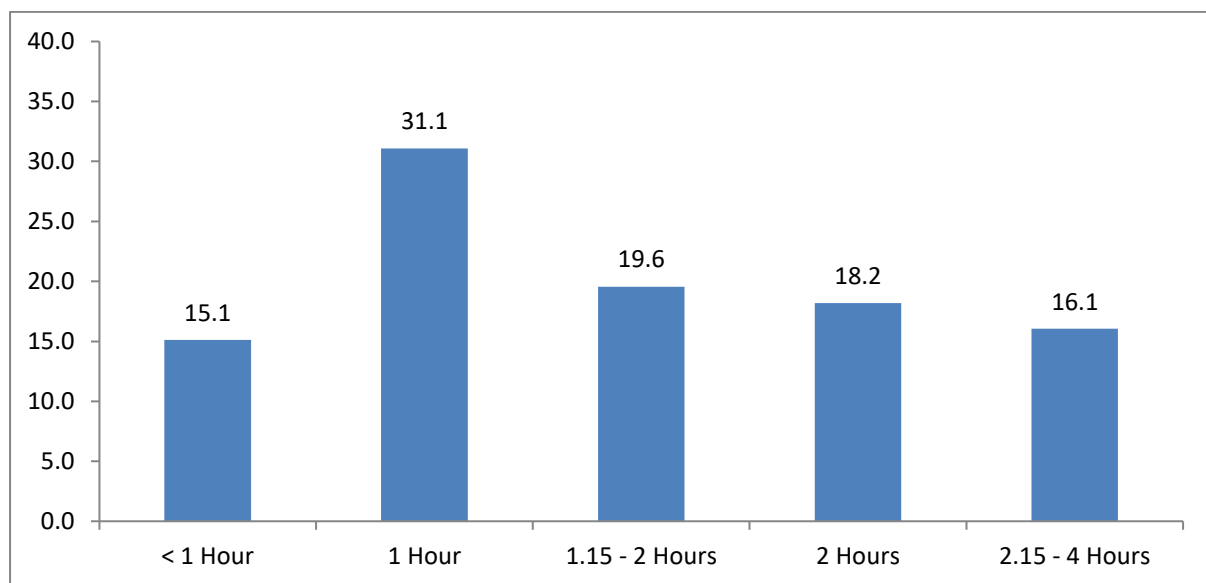
As outlined in Section 4.2, 92 per cent of 2016 players undertook an organised inter-county sports conditioning session the week of a championship match, with this figure rising to 95 per cent during weeks when there was no match. The average amount of time that 2016 players allocated to such a training session during an inter-county match week was 1.6 hours, increasing to 2 hours during non-match weeks. There was no significant difference in the average time allocations by age, code or playing level (Table C.8.1).

**TABLE C.8.1 AVERAGE DURATION OF AN ORGANISED INTER-COUNTY SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSION DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP: AGE, CODE AND PLAYING LEVEL (HOURS)**

	All Players	Aged 18–21	Aged 22–25	Aged 26–30	Aged 31+
IC sports conditioning training: match week	1.6	1.4	1.6	1.6	1.5
IC sports conditioning training: non-match week	2.0	1.9	2.0	2.0	2.0
Football	All Footballers	Division 1	Division 2	Division 3	Division 4
IC sports conditioning training: match week	1.6	1.5	1.8	1.5	1.6
IC sports conditioning training: non-match week	2.0	2.0	2.2	1.9	2.1
Hurling	All Hurlers	MacCarthy Cup	Christy Ring	Nicky Rackard	Lory Meagher
IC sports conditioning training: match week	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.4
IC sports conditioning training: non-match week	2.0	2.0	1.9	1.9	1.9

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

When we examined this in more detail (Figure C.8.1) we found that just over 46 per cent of 2016 players who undertook sports conditioning sessions the week of a championship match spent an hour or less on such a session.

**FIGURE C.8.1 NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO AN ORGANISED INTER-COUNTY SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSION DURING A CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: 2016 PLAYERS (PER CENT)**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

It was predominantly Division 2 footballers (Table C.8.2) and MacCarthy Cup and Nicky Rackard players (Table C.8.3) who devoted more than an hour to their sports conditioning sessions during championship match weeks. A breakdown by age is presented in Figure C.8.2.

**TABLE C.8.2 NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED BY 2016 GAELIC FOOTBALLERS TO AN ORGANISED INTER-COUNTY SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSION DURING A CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND PLAYING LEVEL (PER CENT)**

During 2016 Championship Season 'Match Week' (late May/June)	Football	Division 1	Division 2	Division 3	Division 4
0–1 hour	43.1	48.0	33.5	50.0	42.0
1.15–2 hours	40.0	39.0	41.6	38.0	41.0
2.15–4 hours	17.0	[<14.0]	25.0	[<13.0]	[<17.0]

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.



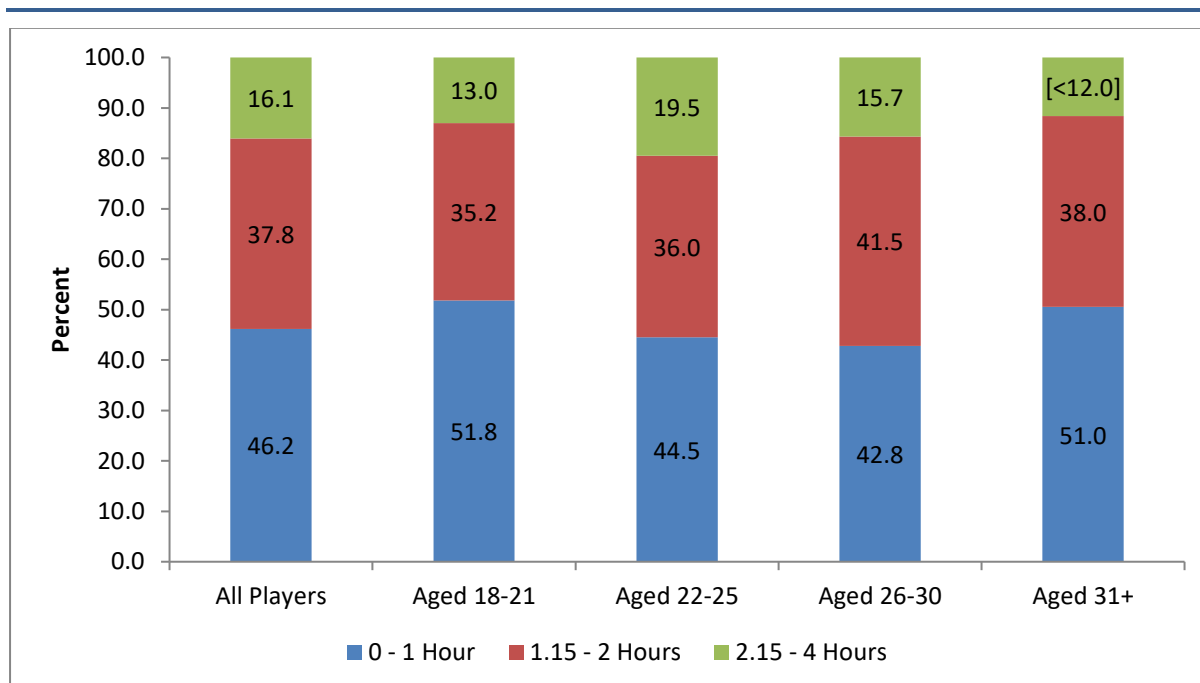
**TABLE C.8.3 NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED BY 2016 HURLERS TO AN ORGANISED INTER-COUNTY SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSION DURING A CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND PLAYING LEVEL (PER CENT)**

During 2016 Championship Season 'Match Week' (late May/June)	Hurling	MacCarthy Cup	Christy Ring	Nicky Rackard	Lory Meagher
0–1 hour	49.5	46.7	55.0	49.0	52.0
1.15–2 hours	35.4	38.6	26.0	40.0	[<29.0]
2.15–4 hours	15.1	14.7	[<19.0]	*	*

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

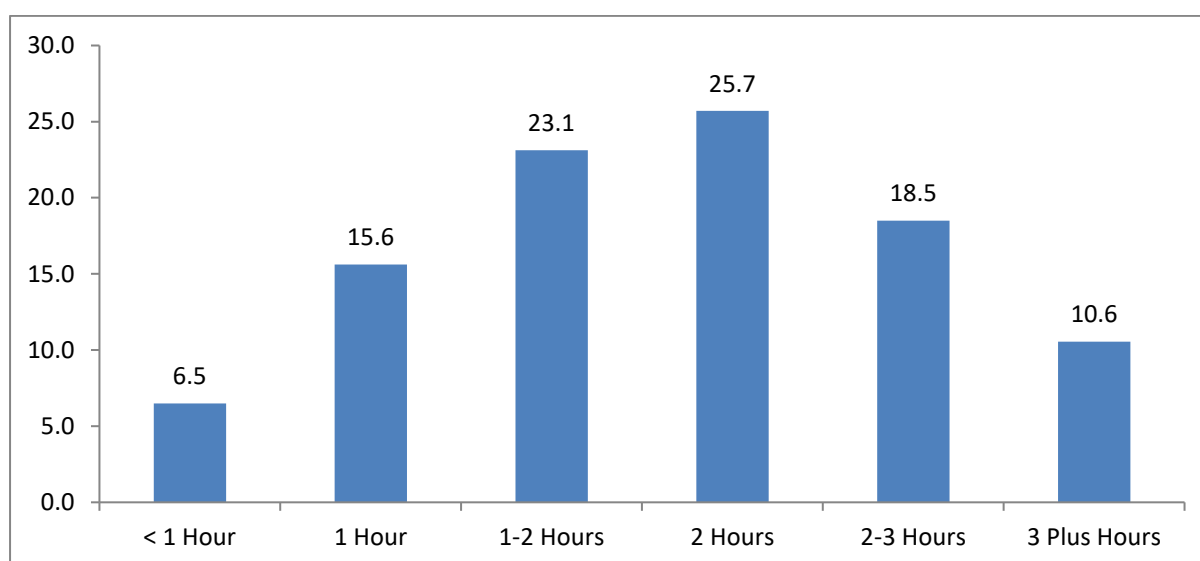
\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE C.8.2 NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO AN ORGANISED INTER-COUNTY SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSION DURING A CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND AGE GROUP**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

During weeks when there was no championship match, the percentage of 2016 players who allocated 2 hours or more to their sports conditioning session rose from 34 per cent to 55 per cent (Figure C.8.3). Consequently, the proportion who allocated an hour or less to such training fell from 46 per cent to 22 per cent. Again, greater proportions of Division 2 footballers and MacCarthy Cup hurlers spent more than 2 hours on their sports conditioning sessions during weeks in which they had no inter-county match (Tables C.8.4 and C.8.5).

**FIGURE C.8.3 NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO AN ORGANISED INTER-COUNTY SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSION DURING A CHAMPIONSHIP NON-MATCH WEEK: 2016 PLAYERS (PER CENT)**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**TABLE C.8.4 NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED BY 2016 GAELIC FOOTBALLERS TO AN ORGANISED INTER-COUNTY SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSION DURING A CHAMPIONSHIP NON-MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND PLAYING LEVEL (PER CENT)**

During 2016 Championship Season 'Non-Match Week' (late May/June)	Football	Division 1	Division 2	Division 3	Division 4
0–1 hour	21.7	21.0	18.8	29.0	[<18.0]
1.15–2 hours	46.9	51.0	42.2	47.0	48.0
2.15–3 hours	20.1	18.0	23.0	[<15.0]	25.0
Above 3 hours	11.3	[<10.0]	16.0	[<10.0]	[<10.0]

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

**TABLE C.8.5 NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED BY A HURLER TO AN ORGANISED INTER-COUNTY SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSION DURING A 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP 'NON-MATCH WEEK': OVERALL AND LEVEL (PER CENT)**

During 2016 Championship Season 'Non-Match Week' (late May/June)	Hurling	MacCarthy Cup	Christy Ring	Nicky Rackard	Lory Meagher
0–1 hour	22.6	17.9	26.0	26.0	34.0
1.15–2 hours	50.9	51.3	50.0	54.0	45.0
2.15–3 hours	16.8	21.0	[<16.0]	[<13.0]	*
Above 3 hours	9.8	9.8	*	*	*

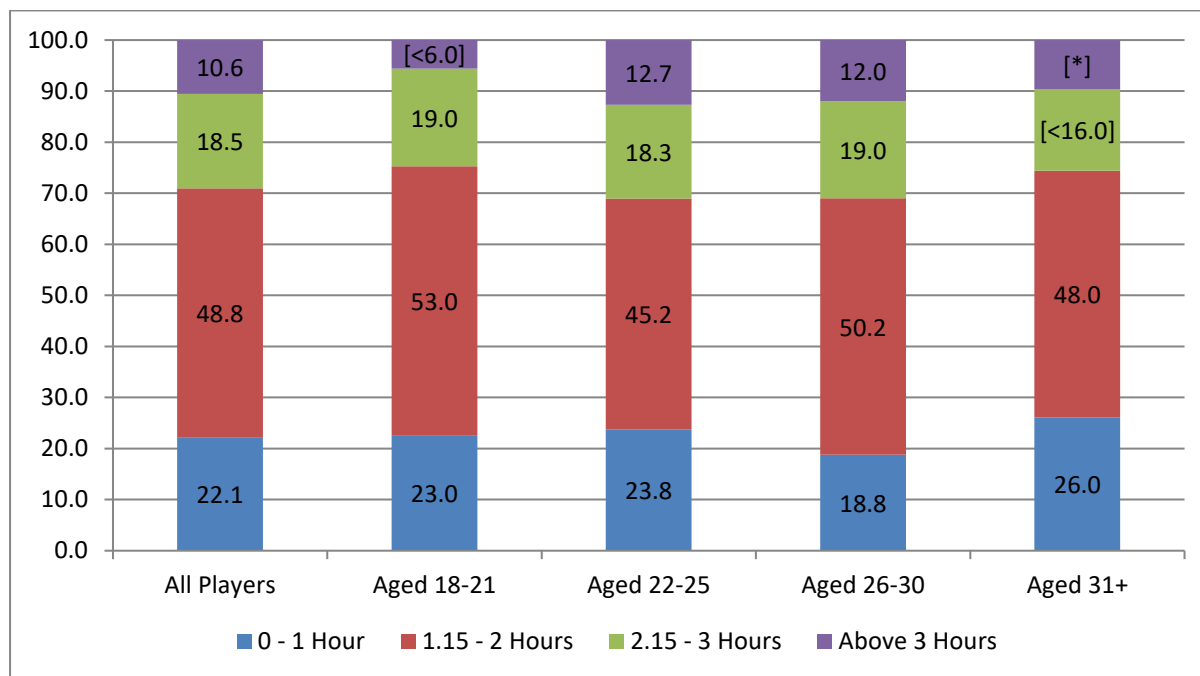
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

A breakdown by age is presented in Figure C.8.4.

**FIGURE C.8.4 NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO AN ORGANISED INTER-COUNTY SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSION DURING A CHAMPIONSHIP NON-MATCH WEEK: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND AGE GROUP (PER CENT)**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution. [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

## C.9 EXAMINATION OF TIME SPENT TRAVELLING TO AND FROM SENIOR INTER-COUNTY SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSIONS

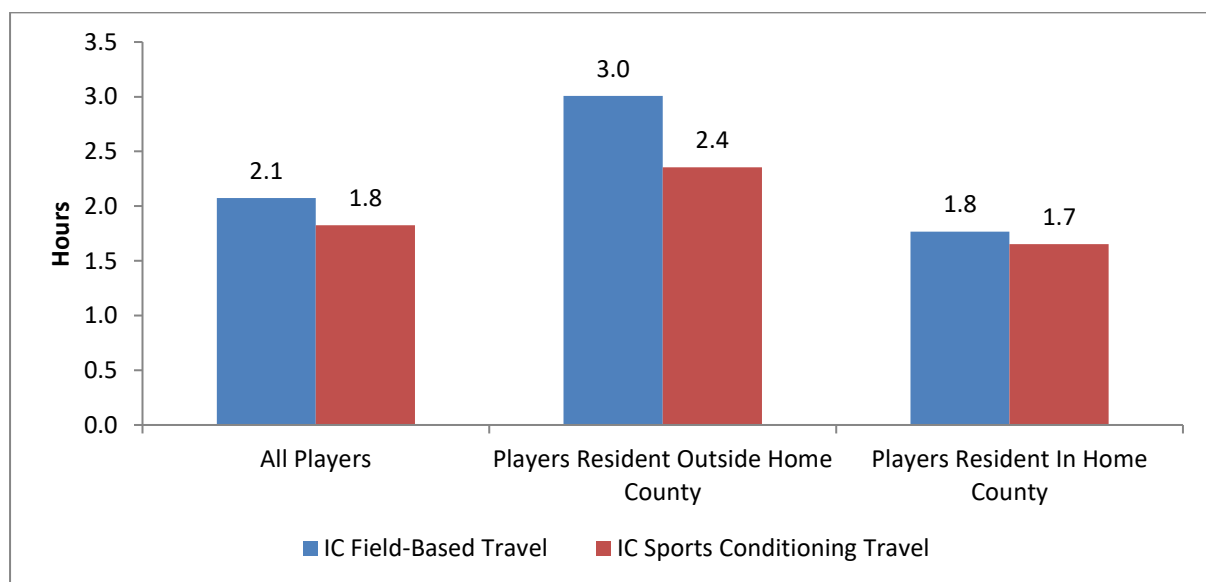
In Figure C.9.1 we examine the average amount of time that 2016 senior players spent travelling to and from an organised inter-county sports conditioning training session. For comparative purposes, we include the average time spent travelling to and from a field-based training session.

As can be seen from Figure C.9.1, 2016 players spent, on average, 1.8 hours travelling to and from their sports conditioning training sessions during the championship. This compares with 2.1 hours travelling to and from a field-based training session, which suggests that some players did not have to travel to their county team training bases for their sports conditioning sessions.

When we look at this by players' residence (Figure C.9.1), we can see that it was predominantly 2016 players resident outside their home county who did not have to travel to their county base for sports conditioning training sessions: the average time that these players spent travelling to and from this type of training session was 2.4 hours compared to 3 hours going to and from field-based sessions. On the

other hand, the time travelled to both types of training session by 2016 players resident within their county was almost identical (Figure C.9.1). This suggests that for most of these players their field-based and sports conditioning training sessions were undertaken at the same location.

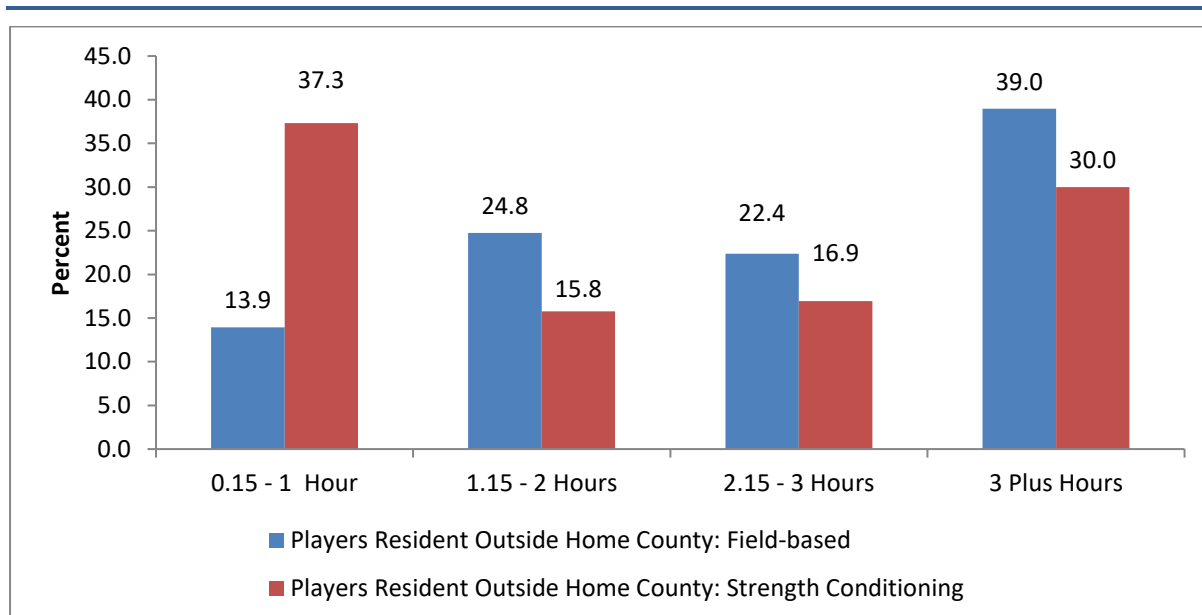
**FIGURE C.9.1 AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOURS SPENT TRAVELLING TO AND FROM ORGANISED INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED AND SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSIONS DURING THE CHAMPIONSHIP: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND PLAYERS' RESIDENCE**



**Source:** *Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).*

In Figures C.9.2 and C.9.3 we give a breakdown of the number of hours spent travelling by 2016 players to both their field-based and sports conditioning training sessions during the championship according to the players' residence. Focusing on players resident outside their home county (Figure C.9.2), we can see that the proportion who spent an hour or less travelling to their sports conditioning sessions is 37 per cent, which compares with only 14 per cent spending this amount of time travelling to their field-based sessions. Consequently, a smaller percentage of 2016 players resident outside their home county who spent over an hour travelling to their field-based sessions did so for their sports conditioning sessions. However, we can see in Figure C.9.2 that a sizeable proportion of this group of 2016 players who spent over 3 hours travelling to and from their inter-county field-based training appear to have done so for their sports conditioning sessions as well: this proportion falls from 39 per cent of players for a field-based session to 30 per cent for a sports conditioning session, while the proportion taking 2.15 to 3 hours falls from 22 per cent for field-based sessions to 17 per cent for sport conditioning sessions.

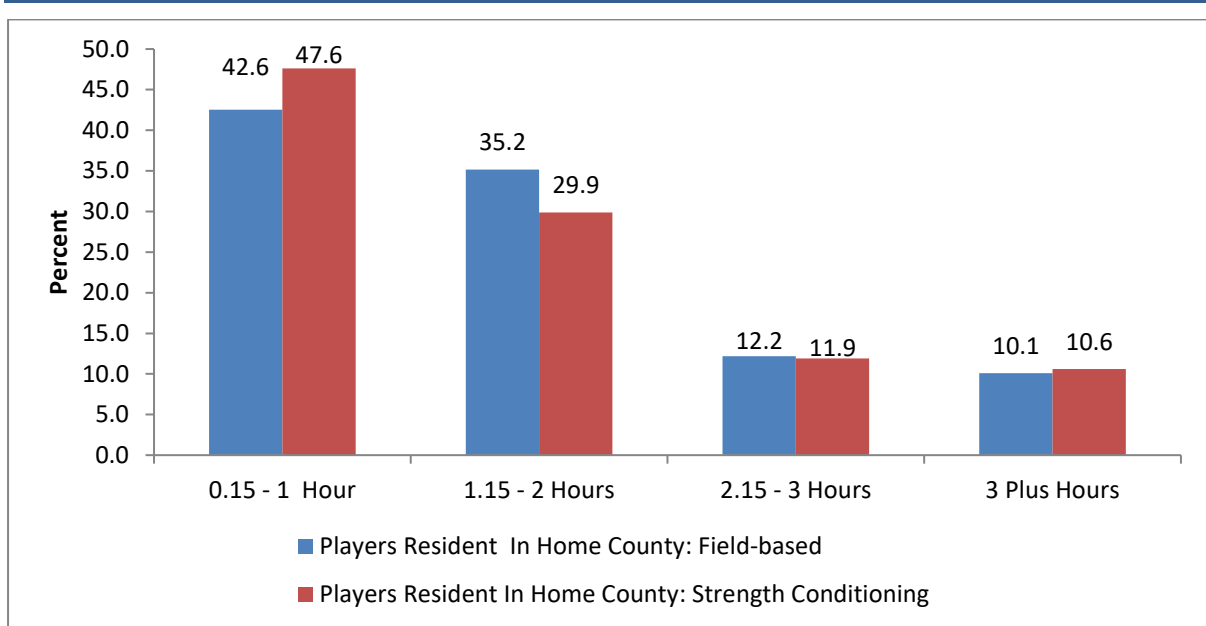
**FIGURE C.9.2 NUMBER OF HOURS SPENT TRAVELLING TO AND FROM ORGANISED INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED AND SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSIONS: 2016 PLAYERS RESIDENT OUTSIDE OF HOME COUNTY**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

When we look at 2016 players resident within their home county (Figure C.9.3), we can see that it would appear that, as indicated previously, most of these players undertake their sports conditioning sessions at the same location as their field-based sessions, as the travel time duration percentages for the two types of training are almost identical, especially those travelling between 2 and 3 hours or over 3 hours for their trainings. Some 2016 players who travelled for between 1 and 2 hours to get their field-based training also appear to have undertaken some of their sports conditioning sessions nearer to their residence as opposed to their county's centralised base, as this percentage falls from 35 to 30 per cent, while the proportions taking an hour or less travel time increase from 43 per cent for a field-based session to 48 per cent for a sports conditioning session.

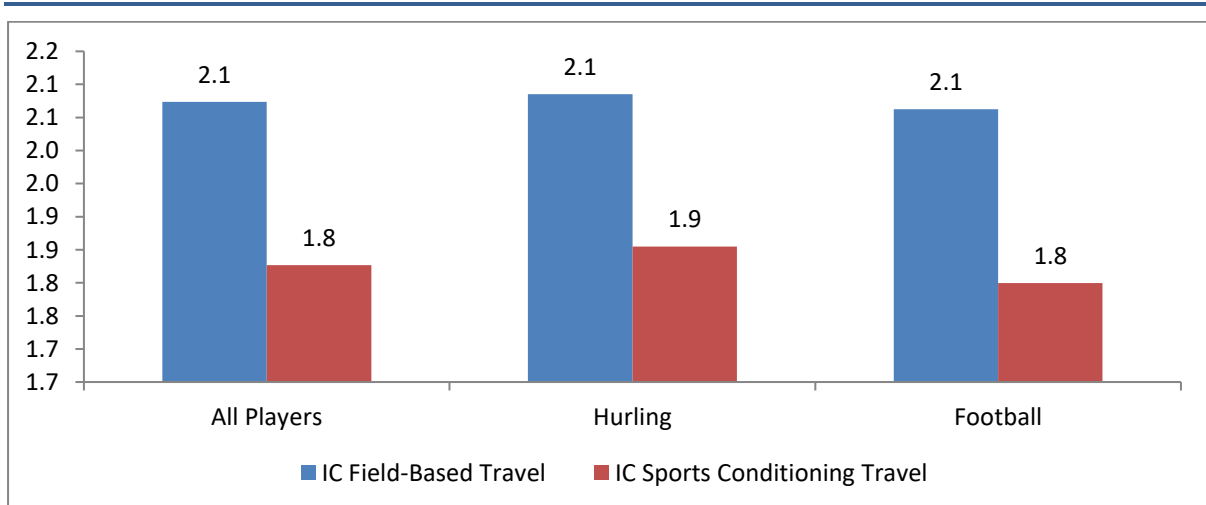
**FIGURE C.9.3 NUMBER OF HOURS SPENT TRAVELLING TO AND FROM ORGANISED INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED AND SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSIONS: 2016 PLAYERS RESIDENT IN HOME COUNTY**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

There was no difference between 2016 hurlers and footballers with regard to the average amount of time that they spent travelling to and from an inter-county sports conditioning training session during the championship (Figure C.9.4). The same is true when we examine this type of training travel time by age and playing level (Table C.9.1).

**FIGURE C.9.4 AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOURS SPENT TRAVELLING TO AND FROM ORGANISED INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED AND SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSIONS DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND CODE**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**TABLE C.9.1 AVERAGE TIME SPENT TRAVELLING TO AND FROM ORGANISED INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED AND SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSIONS DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP: 2016 PLAYERS – AGE AND PLAYING LEVEL (HOURS)**

	Aged 18–21	Aged 22–25	Aged 26–30	Aged 31+
IC field-based travel	2.2	2.1	2.0	1.8
IC sports conditioning travel	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.6
<b>Football playing level</b>	<b>Division 1</b>	<b>Division 2</b>	<b>Division 3</b>	<b>Division 4</b>
IC field-based travel	2.1	1.9	2.1	2.2
IC sports conditioning travel	1.9	1.7	1.8	1.9
<b>Hurling playing level</b>	<b>MacCarthy Cup</b>	<b>Christy Ring</b>	<b>Nicky Rackard</b>	<b>Lory Meagher</b>
IC field-based travel	2.0	2.1	2.3	2.3
IC sports conditioning travel	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.7

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

However, when we take a more detailed look at the times spent travelling to and from sports conditioning training sessions by age (Table C.9.2) we can see that, as was seen for travel time to and from field-based training sessions, 2016 players aged over 30 spent the least amount of time travelling to and from such training sessions: 53 per cent spent an hour or less compared to 45/46 per cent for those aged 22 to 30 and 40 per cent for players aged 18 to 21.

**TABLE C.9.2 BREAKDOWN OF THE NUMBER OF HOURS SPENT TRAVELLING TO AND FROM AN INTER-COUNTY SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSION: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND AGE GROUP**

During 2016 Championship Season	All Players	Aged 18–21	Aged 22–25	Aged 26–30	Aged 31+
0.15–1 hour	45.0	39.8	46.4	45.0	53.0
1.15–2 hours	26.5	28.4	26.3	26.3	23.0
2.15–3 hours	13.2	13.7	12.4	13.5	14.0
3.15–4 hours	9.7	11.5	9.9	9.2	[<7.0]
4+ hours	5.7	6.7	5.1	6.0	[<5.0]

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

## C.10 EXAMINATION OF THE NUMBER OF ORGANISED INTER-COUNTY TRAINING SESSIONS UNDERTAKEN BY 2016 SENIOR PLAYERS

In this section, we examine the number of organised inter-county training sessions that 2016 players undertook during the championship, specifically late May/June. This analysis is broken out into field-based and sports conditioning training sessions, and is conducted for both inter-county match and non-match weeks

(Monday to Sunday).

As discussed in Section 4.2 of the report, 2016 players undertook an average of 2.4 pitch-based sessions with their inter-county team the week of a match. This increased to 3 sessions during weeks in which there was no match. Regarding inter-county sports conditioning training, on average 2016 players undertook 1.5 sessions the week of a championship match, rising to 1.9 sessions during weeks in which there was no match.

There was no difference between 2016 hurlers and footballers with regard to the average number of pitch sessions undertaken, whether it was a match or non-match week. There were some differences in relation to sports conditioning sessions, though. Specifically, the average number was slightly lower among hurlers. This was driven by Christy Ring, Nicky Rackard and Lory Meagher hurlers undertaking fewer sports conditioning training sessions during both championship match and non-match weeks (late May/June). MacCarthy Cup hurlers, on the other hand, engaged in the same average number of such sessions as 2016 footballers, and their average number of pitch-based sessions was the same as for footballers too.<sup>172</sup>

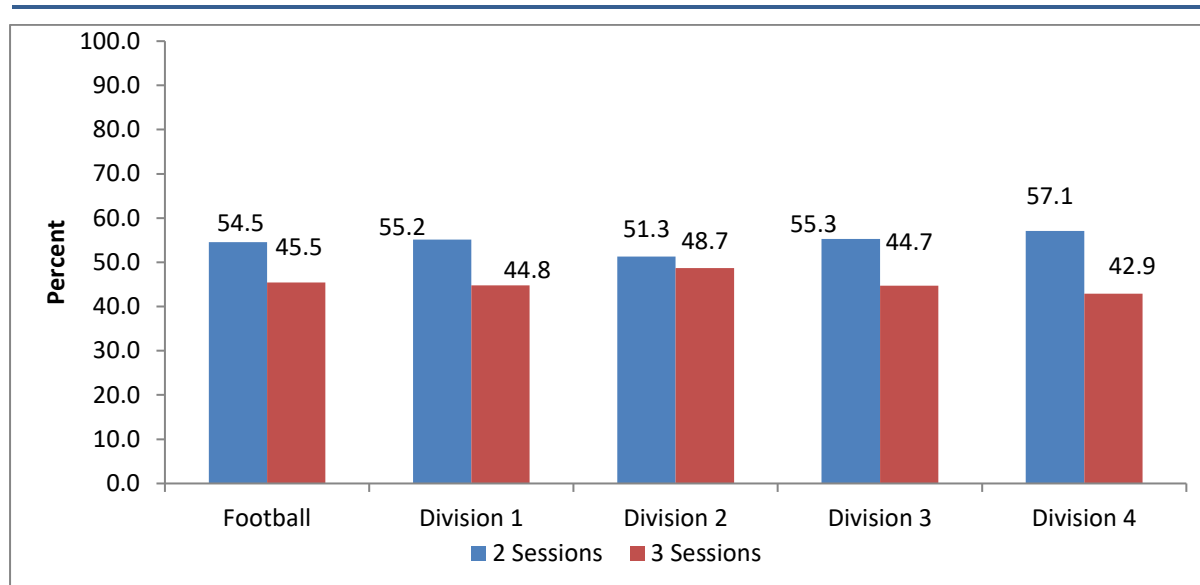
### **Inter-county match week**

Looking in more detail at the actual number of field-based sessions that 2016 players undertook, we can see in Figure C.10.1 that 55 per cent of 2016 senior Gaelic footballers had two field-based training sessions the week of a championship game, while the other 46 per cent of players had three sessions. There was very little difference by playing level in this regard.

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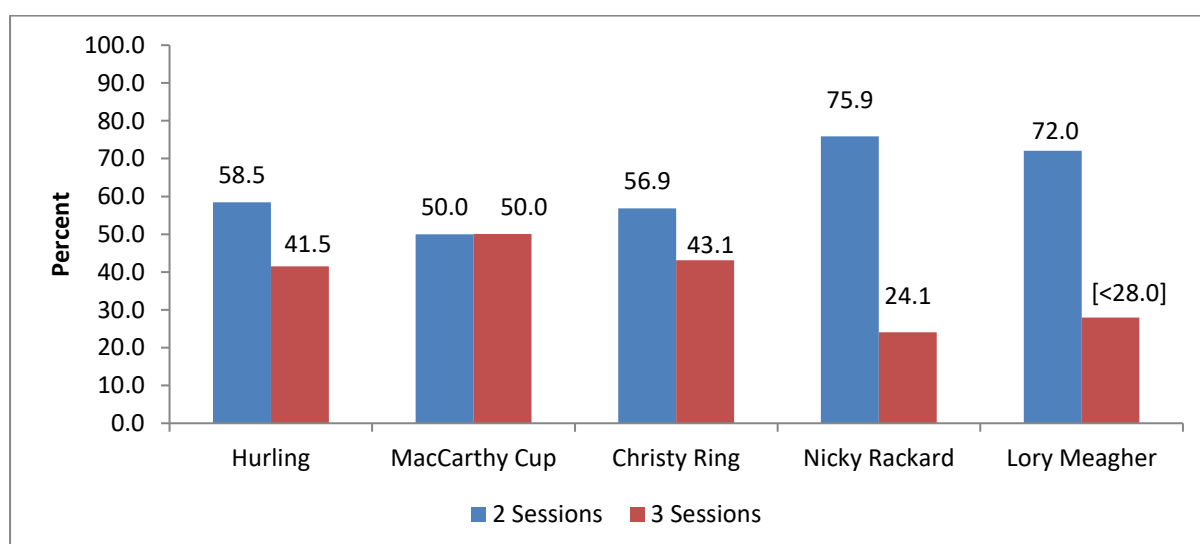
<sup>172</sup> Detailed results are available from the authors on request.



**FIGURE C.10.1 NUMBER OF FIELD-BASED TRAINING SESSIONS FOR 2016 GAELIC FOOTBALLERS DURING A CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND LEVEL**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

A slightly higher proportion of 2016 hurlers than footballers had two field-based sessions the week of a game – 59 per cent compared to 55 per cent (Figure C.10.2). This difference was driven by greater proportions of Nicky Rackard and Lory Meagher hurlers, and to a lesser extent Christy Ring players too, having two pitch sessions the week of a match.

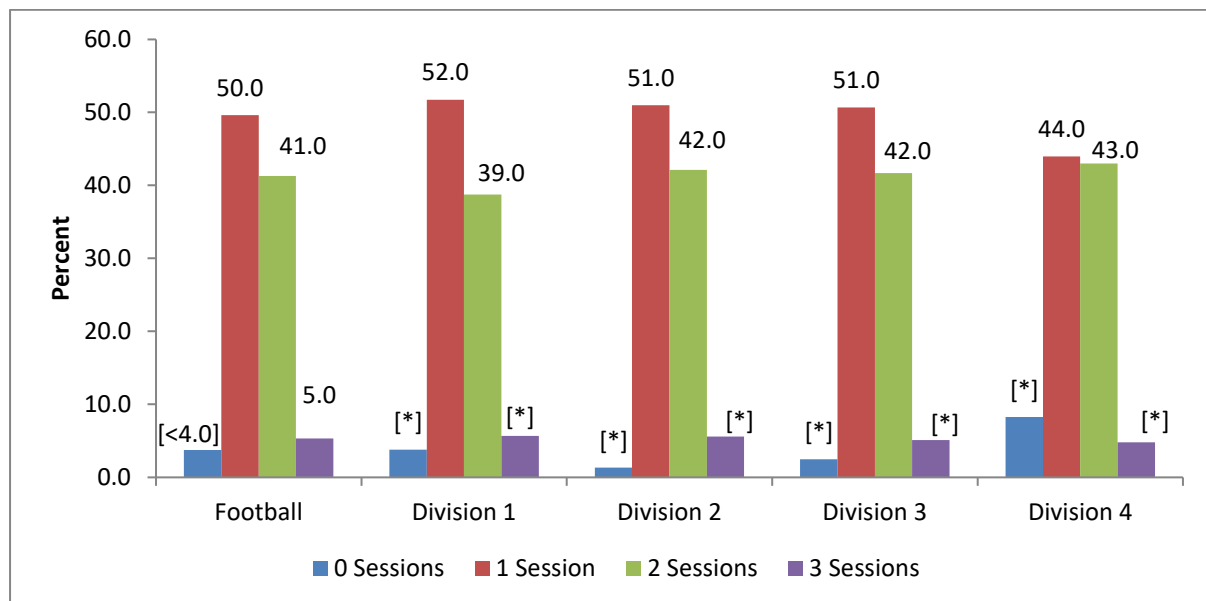
**FIGURE C.10.2 NUMBER OF FIELD-BASED TRAINING SESSIONS FOR 2016 HURLERS DURING A CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND LEVEL**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([<28.0]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

Fifty per cent of 2016 footballers undertook at least one inter-county sports conditioning session the week of a championship game (Figure C.10.3) Another 41 per cent did two sessions and just over 5 per cent of players indicated that they undertook three such sessions in match weeks. Apart from Division 4 footballers, there was very little variation across football divisions in terms of the number of sports conditioning sessions undertaken the week of a championship game.

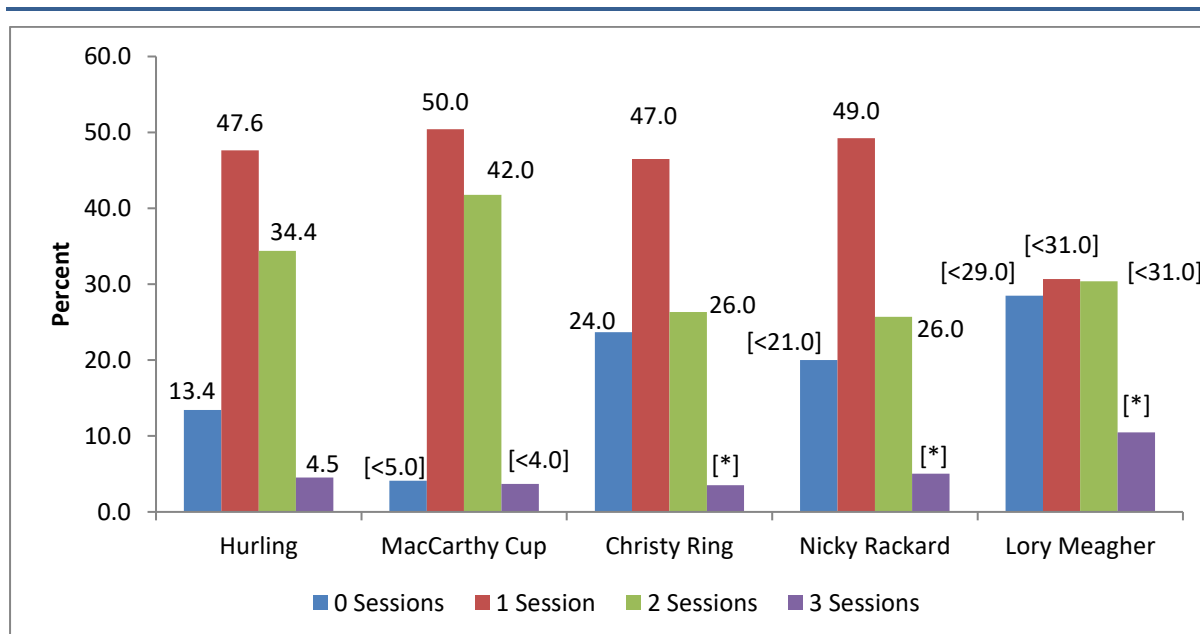
**FIGURE C.10.3 NUMBER OF SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSIONS FOR 2016 GAELIC FOOTBALLERS DURING A CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND LEVEL**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution. [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

In relation to 2016 hurlers (Figure C.10.4), 48 per cent of players undertook one sports conditioning session the week of a championship game, 34 per cent two sessions and 5 per cent three sessions. Compared to 2016 footballers, a much bigger proportion of hurlers did not undertake a sports conditioning session the week of a game – 13 per cent compared to less than 4 per cent of footballers. When we look at this by playing level, we can see that it was predominantly Lory Meagher, Christy Ring and Nicky Rackard players who did not undertake a sports conditioning session the week of a championship game. Nevertheless, quite sizeable proportions of these players undertook one or more such sessions in match weeks.

**FIGURE C.10.4 NUMBER OF SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSIONS FOR 2016 HURLERS DURING A CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND LEVEL**

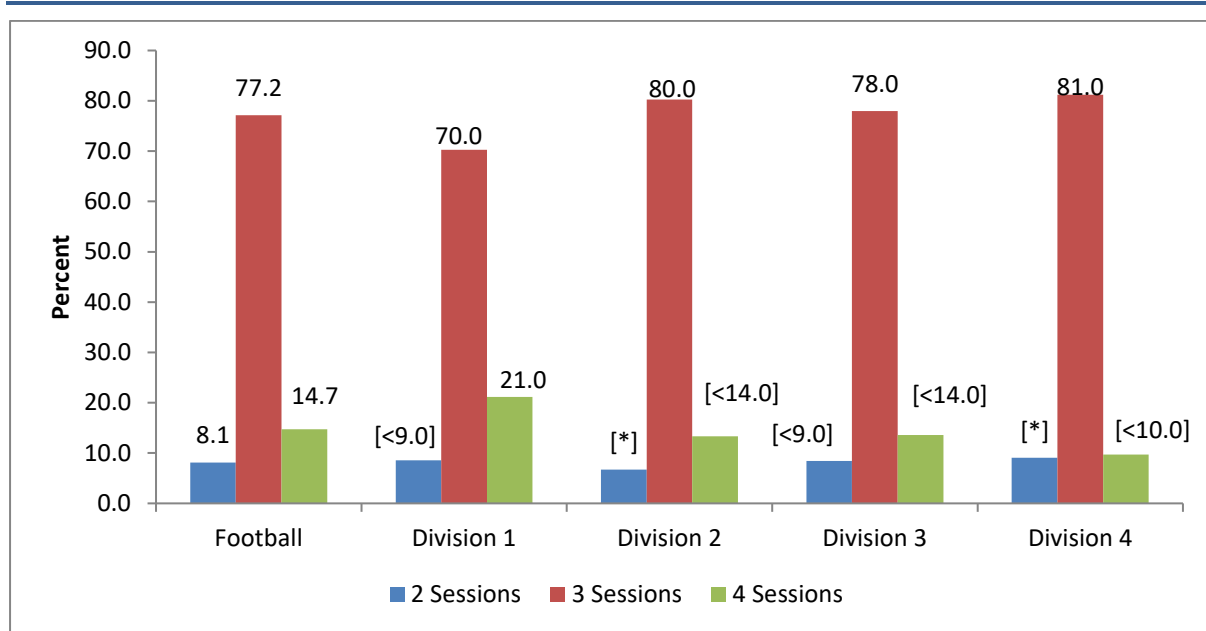
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution. [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

### Inter-county non-match week

During a championship non-match week, 77 per cent of 2016 Gaelic footballers had three field-based training sessions (Figure C.10.5). This is up from 46 per cent the week of a championship game (Figure C.10.1). Another 15 per cent of footballers indicated that they had four field-based sessions in the weeks that they did not have a championship game, while 8 per cent of players had two field-based sessions.

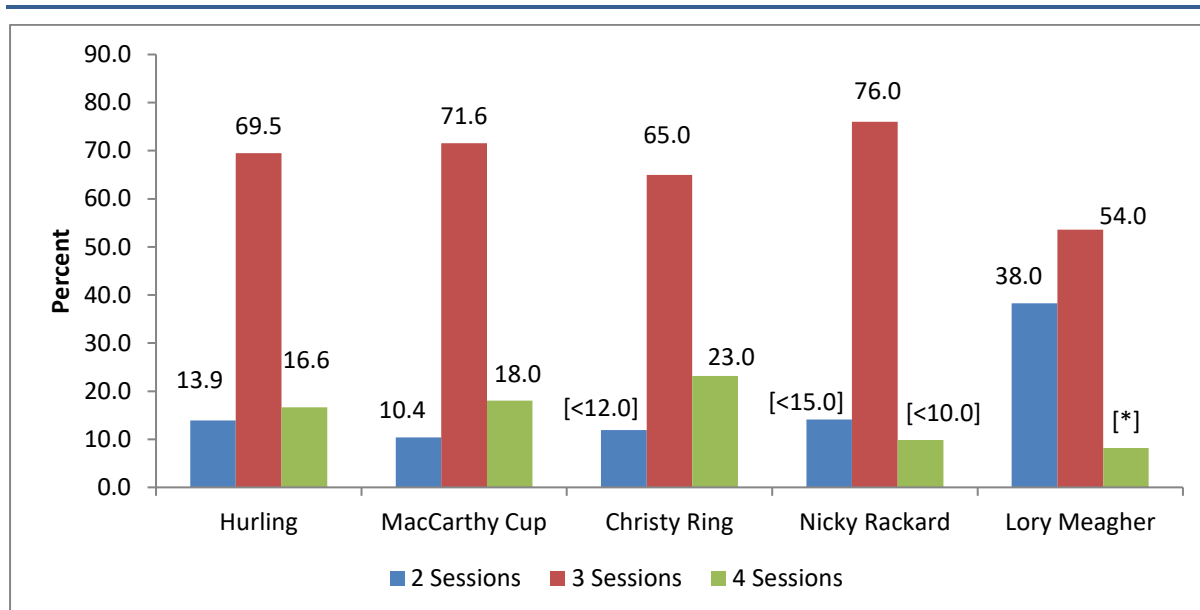
A greater proportion of 2016 Division 1 footballers had four field-based sessions during weeks when they had no championship game (Figure C.10.5).

**FIGURE C.10.5 NUMBER OF FIELD-BASED TRAINING SESSIONS FOR 2016 FOOTBALLERS DURING A CHAMPIONSHIP NON-MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND LEVEL**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution. [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

In relation to 2016 hurlers (Figure C.10.6), 70 per cent had three field-based sessions during weeks in which they had no championship match: this compares with 42 per cent of hurlers having this number of field-based sessions during a championship match week (Figure C.10.2). Seventeen per cent of players had four field-based sessions during non-match weeks, while 14 per cent had two field-based sessions. It was predominantly Lory Meagher hurlers who had two field-based sessions during weeks in which they had no county matches.

**FIGURE C.10.6 NUMBER OF FIELD-BASED TRAINING SESSIONS FOR 2016 HURLERS DURING A CHAMPIONSHIP NON-MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND LEVEL**

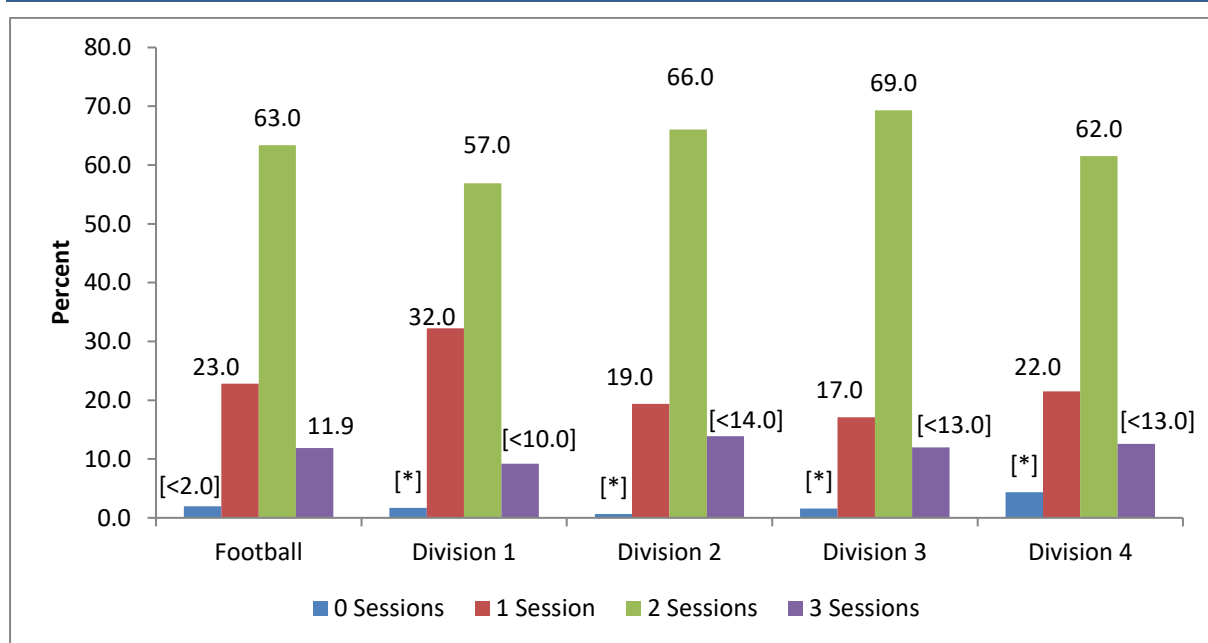
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution. [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

We can see from Figure C.10.7 that 63 per cent of 2016 Gaelic footballers were undertaking two inter-county sports conditioning sessions during a non-match week. This is up from 41 per cent during a match week. Twenty-three per cent of players undertook one such session during non-match weeks (down from 50 per cent during match weeks), while 12 per cent of 2016 footballers indicated that they undertook three sports conditioning sessions during a non-match week (up from 5 per cent during a match week).

Compared to Division 1 footballers, greater proportions of Division 2, 3 and 4 players were undertaking two to three sports conditioning sessions during weeks in which they had no championship game.

**FIGURE C.10.7 NUMBER OF SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSIONS FOR GAELIC FOOTBALLERS DURING A 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP NON-MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND LEVEL**

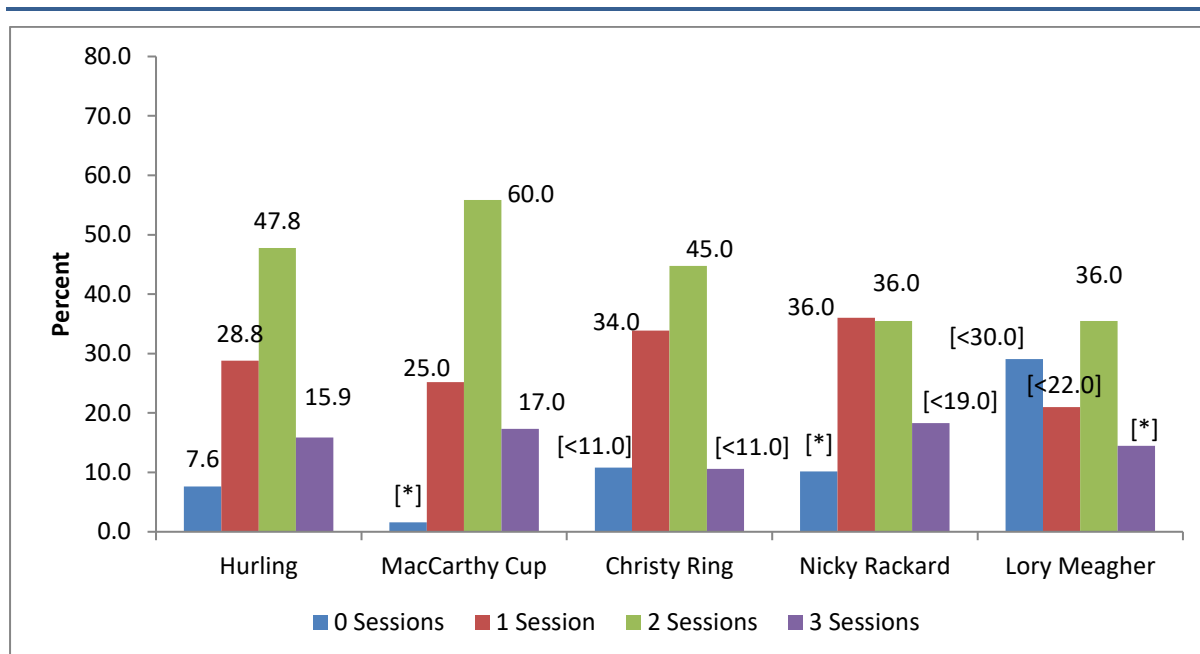


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.  
[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

Regarding 2016 hurlers (Figure C.10.8), 48 per cent undertook two sports conditioning sessions during weeks when they had no championship game: this compares with 34 per cent during a championship match week. Another 16 per cent of players undertook three such sessions during a non-match week, up from 5 per cent during a match week.

Eight per cent of 2016 hurlers did not undertake any sports conditioning sessions in the weeks when they had no championship game. This finding predominantly relates to Lory Meagher hurlers and, to a lesser extent, Christy Ring and Nicky Rackard players as well. Consequently, greater proportions of MacCarthy Cup hurlers were undertaking two to three sports conditioning sessions during non-match weeks: 77 per cent compared to between 50 and 56 per cent of Christy Ring, Nicky Rackard and Lory Meagher hurlers.

**FIGURE C.10.8 NUMBER OF SPORTS CONDITIONING TRAINING SESSIONS FOR HURLERS DURING A 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP NON-MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND LEVEL**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution. [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

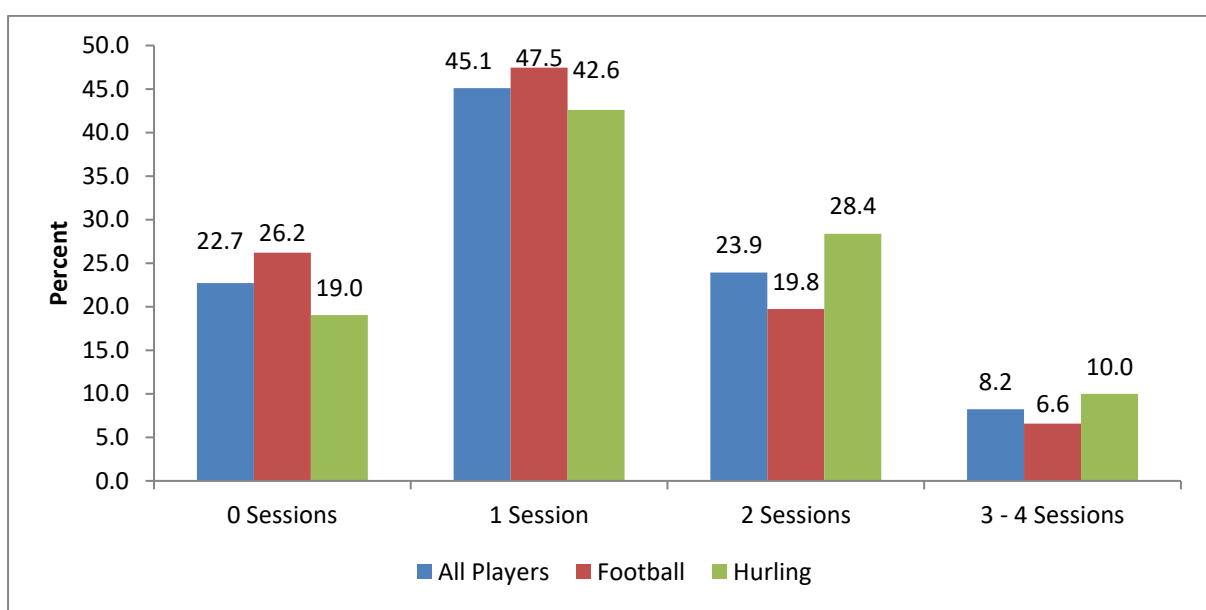
### C.11 EXAMINATION OF INDIVIDUALLY INSTIGATED TRAINING SESSIONS UNDERTAKEN BY 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS

In this section, we examine the number of individually instigated training sessions that 2016 players undertook during the championship (late May/June). This analysis is undertaken for both inter-county championship match and non-match weeks (Monday to Sunday).

#### Number of sessions: inter-county match week

As can be seen in Figure C.11.1, only 23 per cent of 2016 players did not undertake any self-motivated training sessions the week of an inter-county game. Of the remainder, 45 per cent undertook one individually instigated training session, 24 per cent two such sessions and 8 per cent three to four sessions. A larger proportion of hurlers engaged in self-motivated training sessions the week of an inter-county game – 81 per cent compared to 74 per cent of footballers.

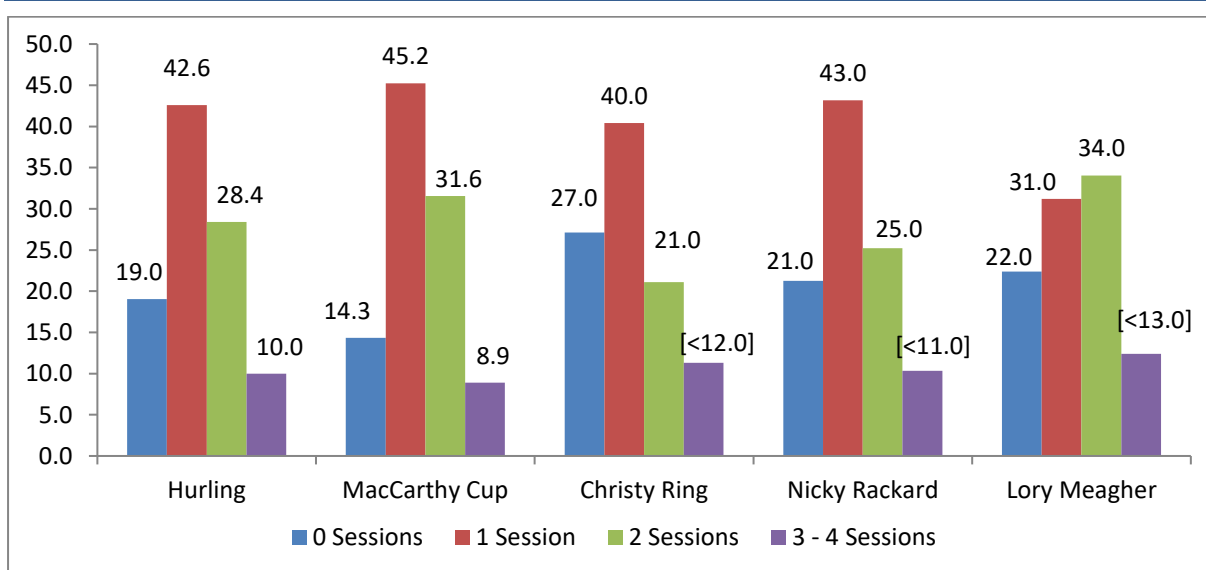
**FIGURE C.11.1 NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALLY INSTIGATED TRAINING SESSIONS DURING A 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND CODE**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

An examination of this by playing level reveals that a larger proportion of 2016 MacCarthy Cup hurlers were undertaking individual training sessions the week of an inter-county game: 86 per cent compared to 73 per cent of Christy Ring hurlers, 79 per cent of Nicky Rackard hurlers and 78 per cent of Lory Meagher players (Figure C.11.2).

**FIGURE C.11.2 NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALLY INSTIGATED TRAINING SESSIONS DURING A 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: HURLERS**



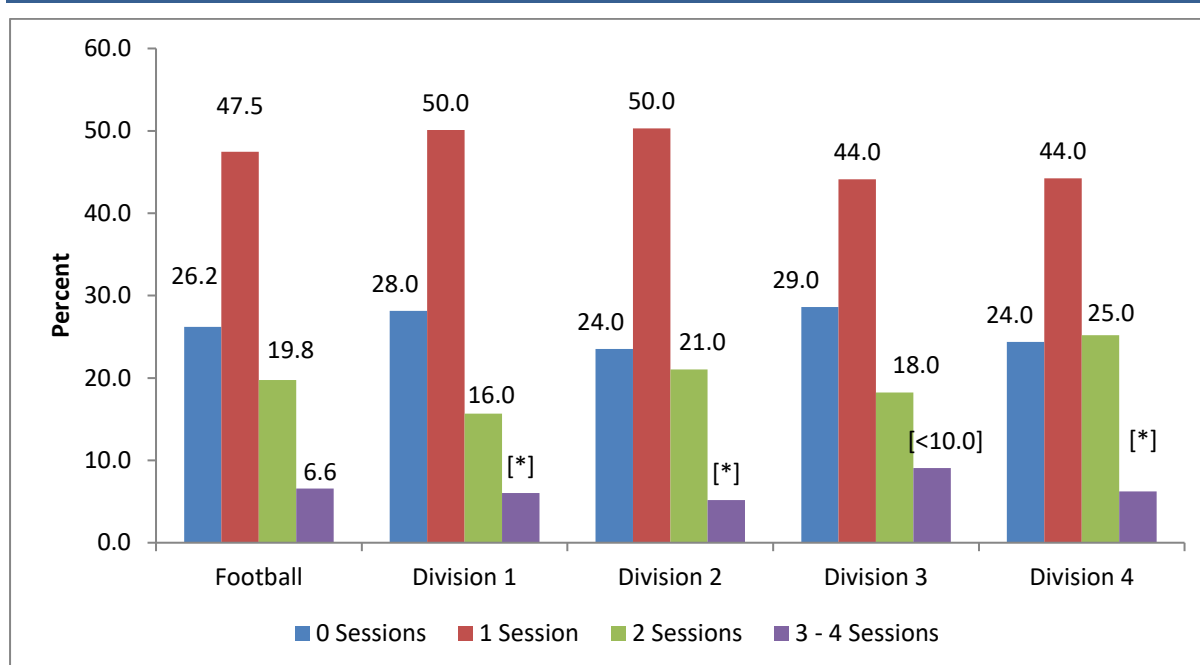
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.



There was very little difference among 2016 footballers in this regard (Figure C.11.3).

**FIGURE C.11.3 NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALLY INSTIGATED TRAINING SESSIONS DURING A 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: GAELIC FOOTBALLERS**



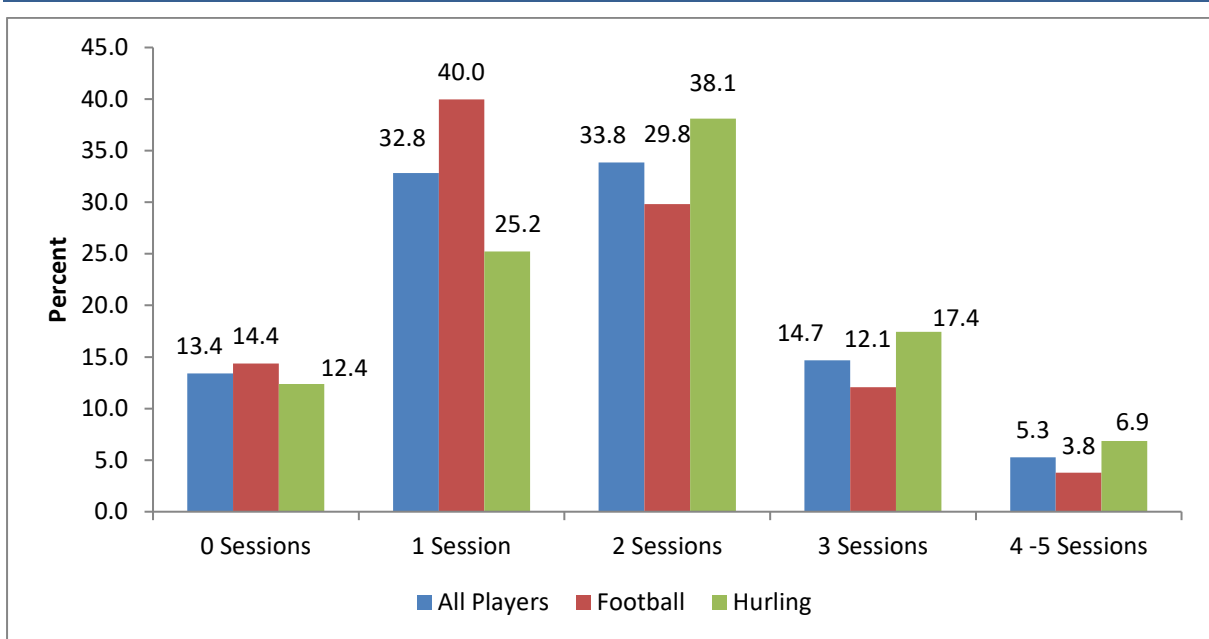
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

### Number of sessions: inter-county non-match week

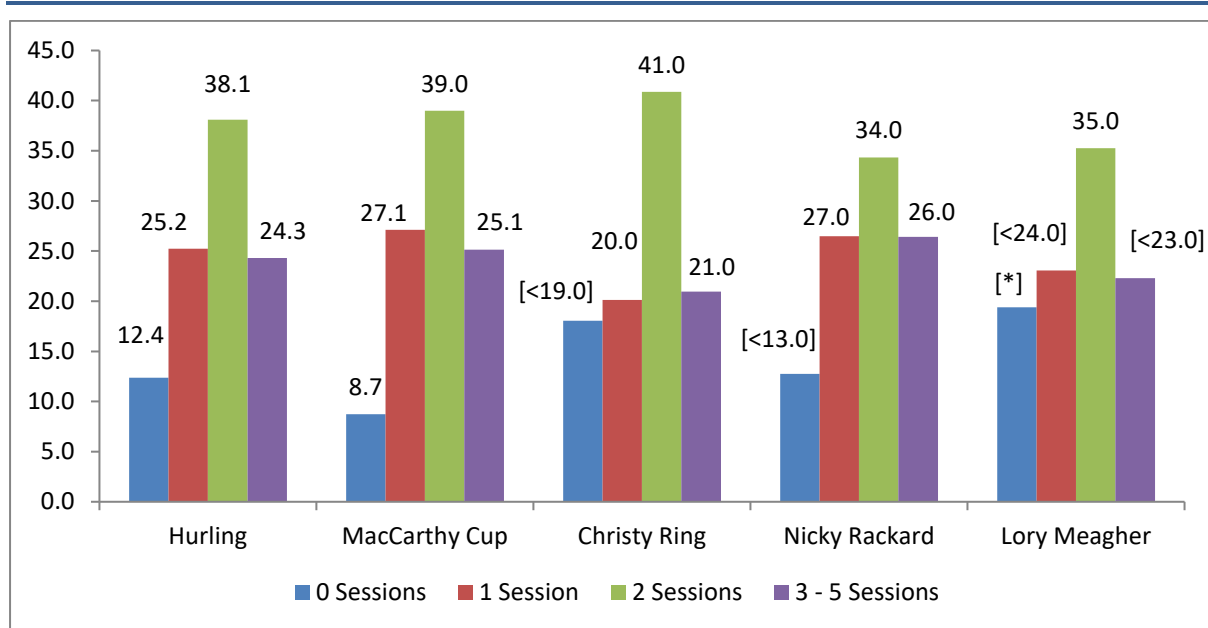
During weeks when there was no championship match, 87 per cent of 2016 players undertook at least one individually instigated training session (Figure C.11.4): this compares with 77 per cent during weeks when players had an inter-county match. This time, similar proportions of hurlers and footballers were undertaking at least one self-motivated training session during weeks when they had no game – 88 and 86 per cent respectively.

**FIGURE C.11.4 NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALLY INSTIGATED TRAINING SESSIONS DURING A 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP NON-MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND CODE**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

A breakdown of the number of individually instigated training sessions during weeks in which there was no inter-county match by playing level is presented in Figure C.11.5 for 2016 hurlers and in Figure C.11.6 for footballers.

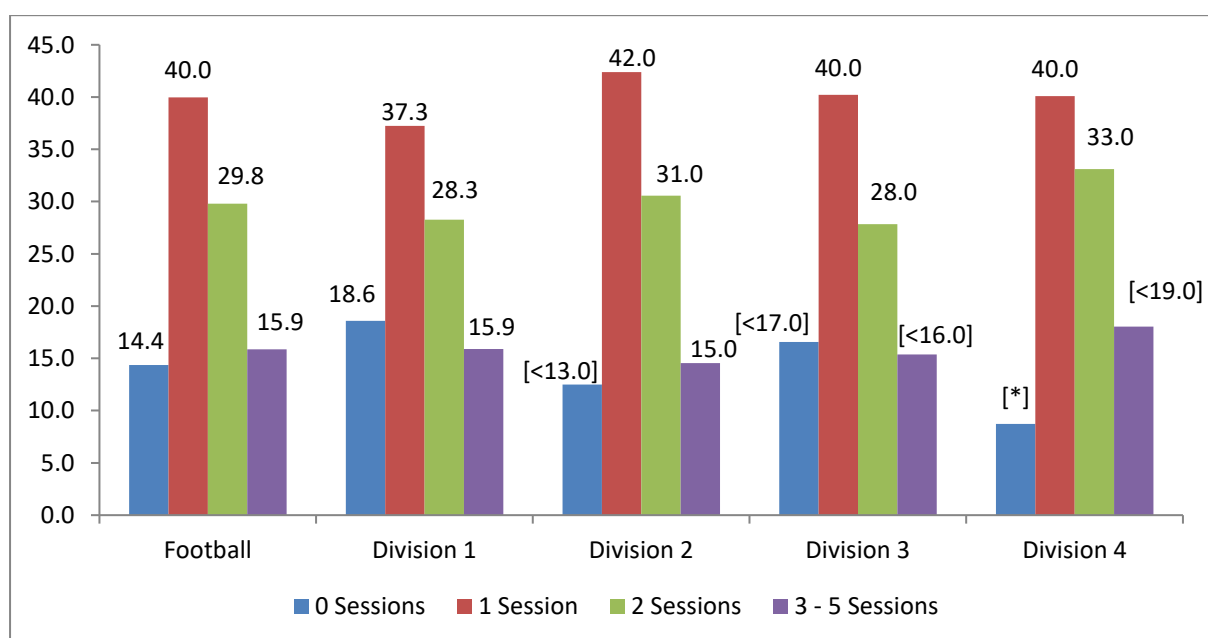
**FIGURE C.11.5 NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALLY INSTIGATED TRAINING SESSIONS DURING A 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP NON-MATCH WEEK: HURLERS**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution. [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE C.11.6 NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALLY INSTIGATED TRAINING SESSIONS DURING A 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP NON-MATCH WEEK: GAELIC FOOTBALLERS**



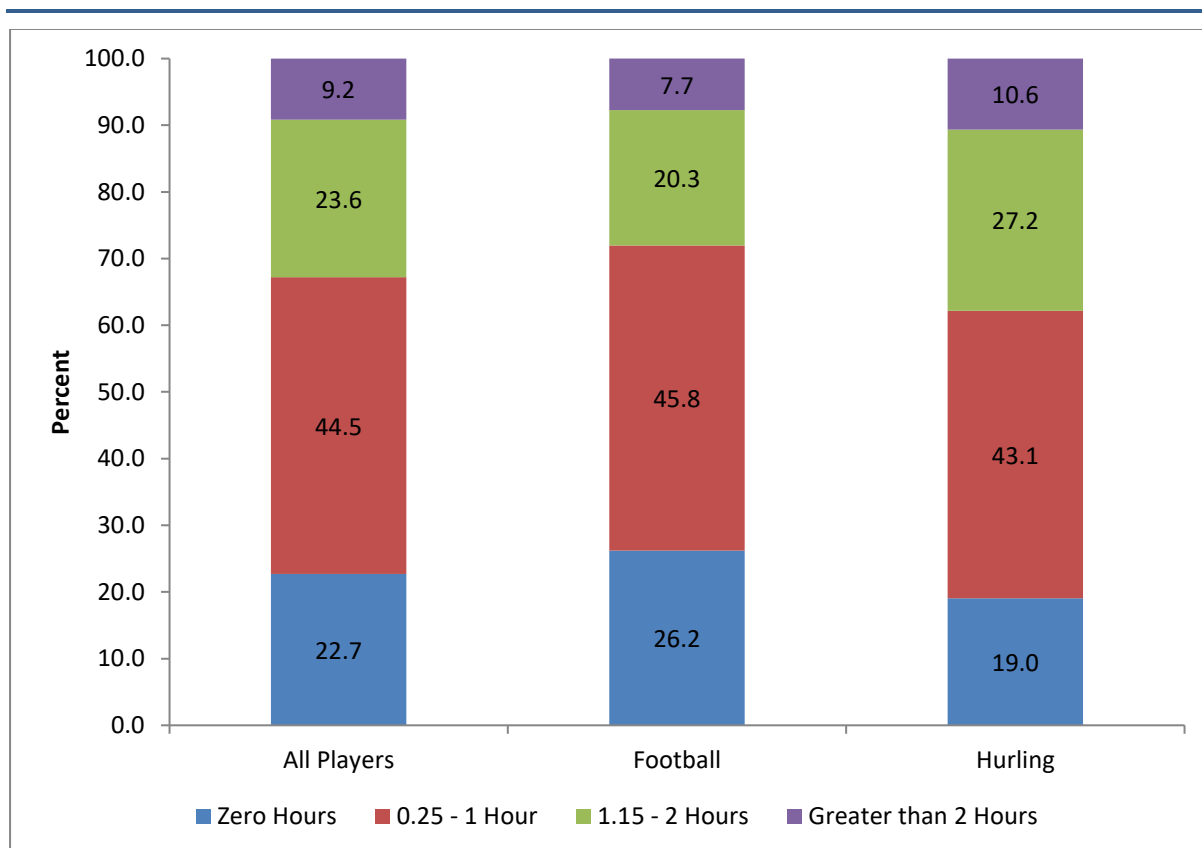
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution. [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

### Duration of sessions: inter-county match week

We mentioned previously that 23 per cent of 2016 players did not undertake an individually instigated training session the week of a championship match. For those that did, 45 per cent trained for less than an hour, 24 per cent for between one and two hours, and the remaining 9 per cent engaged in an individually instigated training session that lasted more than 2 hours (Figure C.11.7). A greater proportion of hurlers trained for more than one hour the week of an inter-county match – 38 per cent compared to 28 per cent of footballers.

**FIGURE C.11.7 BREAKDOWN OF THE NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO AN INDIVIDUALLY INSTIGATED TRAINING SESSION DURING A 2016 INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND CODE**



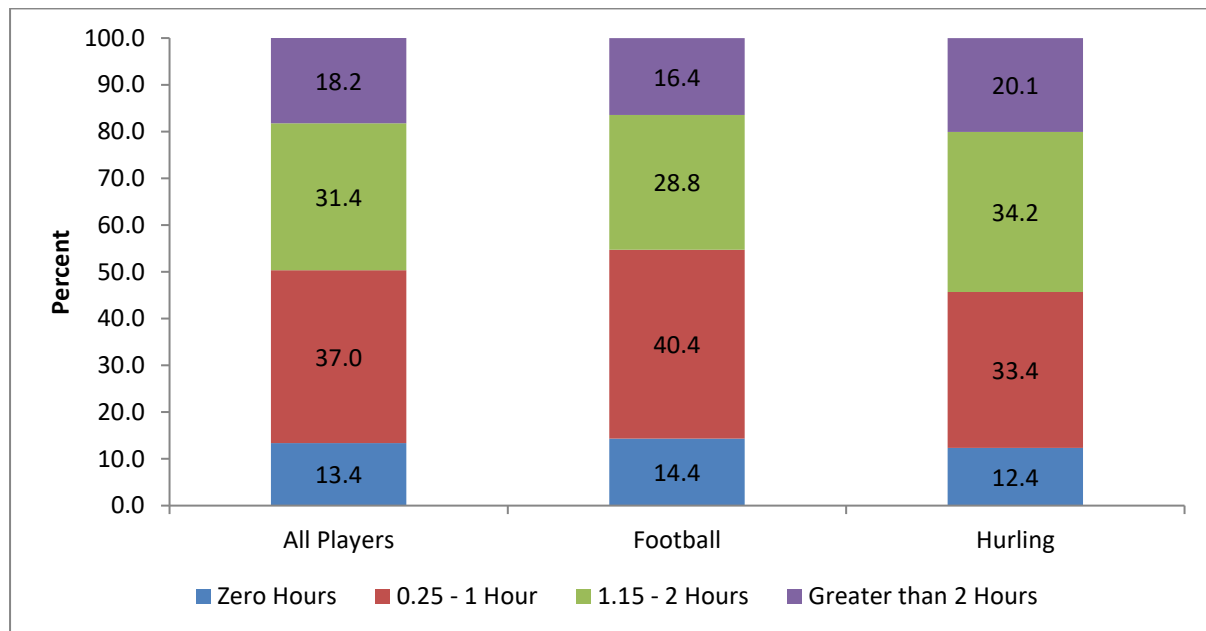
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

### Duration of sessions: inter-county non-match week

As mentioned already, there was an increase in the proportion of 2016 players who undertook a self-motivated training session during weeks when they had no inter-county match: 87 per cent compared to 77 per cent the weeks in which players had a match (Figure C.11.8). There was also a rise in the percentages undertaking longer duration sessions. Specifically, the proportion undertaking a session that was longer than an hour increased to 50 per cent from 33 per cent during the week

of a game.

**FIGURE C.11.8 BREAKDOWN OF THE NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO AN INDIVIDUALLY INSTIGATED TRAINING SESSION DURING A 2016 INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP NON-MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND CODE**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

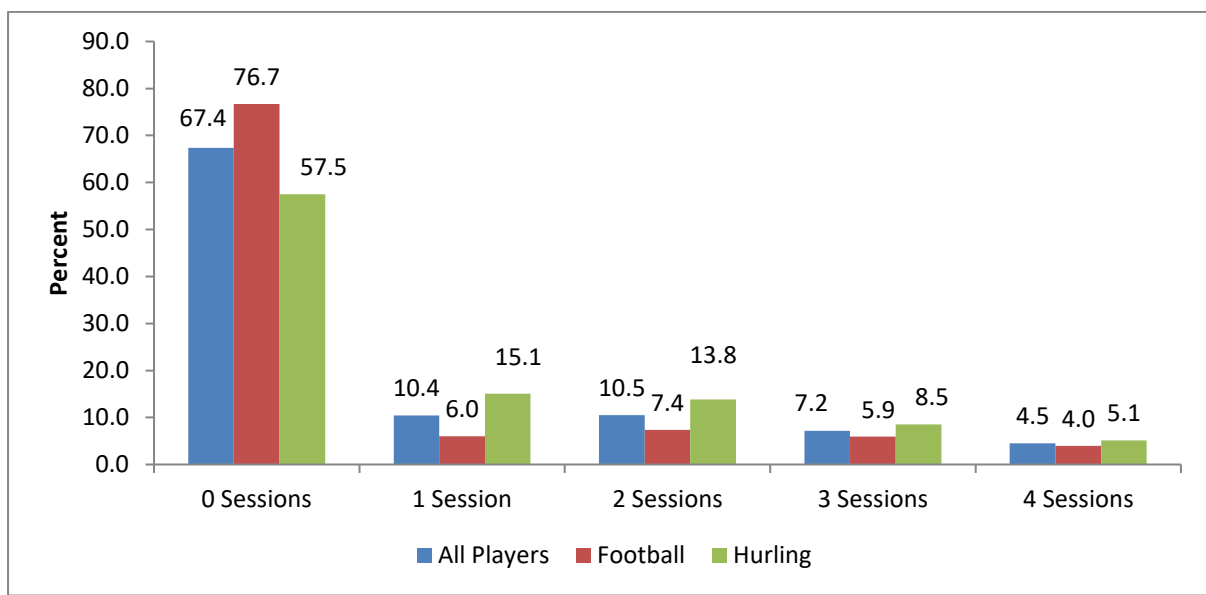
## C.12 EXAMINATION OF TRAINING SESSIONS/GAMES WITH OTHER GAELIC TEAMS UNDERTAKEN BY 2016 PLAYERS DURING THE SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP

In this section, we examine the number of training sessions and/or games that 2016 players undertook with other Gaelic teams that they were involved with during the championship (late May/June), during both inter-county match and non-match weeks (Monday to Sunday). We also examine the duration of these trainings/matches. As indicated in Section 4.2 of the report, for most 2016 players this other Gaelic team would have been their club.

### Number of other Gaelic team training sessions/games: inter-county match week

Sixty-seven per cent of 2016 players did not play any games or train with their other Gaelic teams the week of an inter-county championship match (Figure C.12.1). This figure was much higher among 2016 footballers: 77 per cent compared to 58 per cent of hurlers.

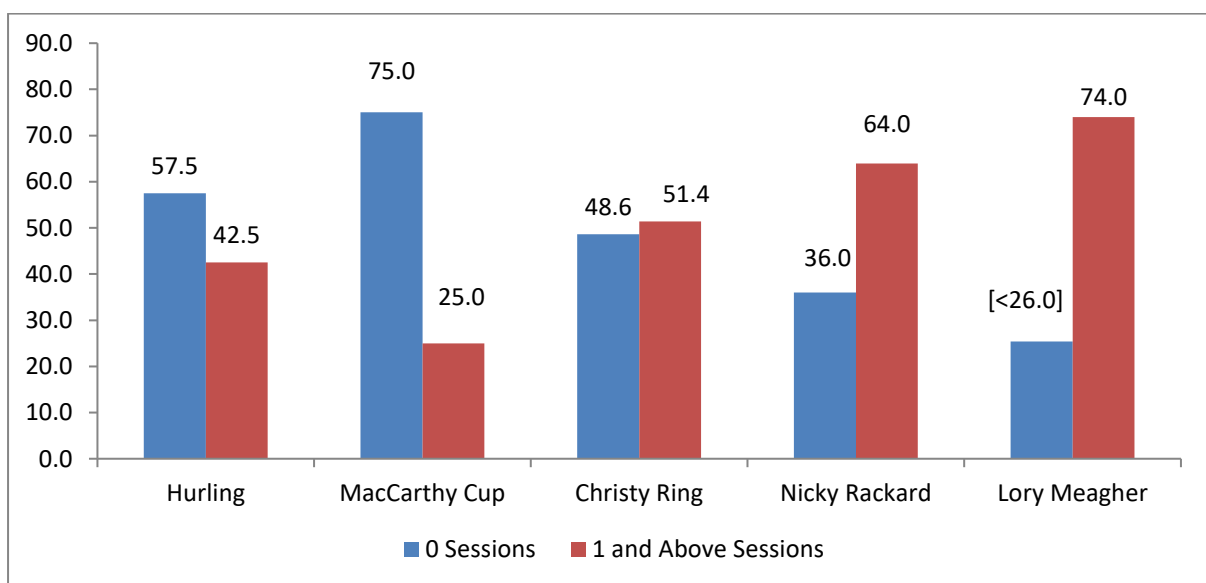
**FIGURE C.12.1 NUMBER OF TRAINING SESSIONS/GAMES WITH OTHER GAELIC TEAMS DURING A 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND CODE**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

It was predominantly Christy Ring, Nicky Rackard and Lory Meagher hurlers who were undertaking at least one session and/or game with their other Gaelic team during an inter-county championship match week: 51 per cent of Christy Ring hurlers, 64 per cent of Nicky Rackard and 74 per cent of Lory Meagher players compared to 25 per cent of MacCarthy Cup hurlers (Figure C.12.2).

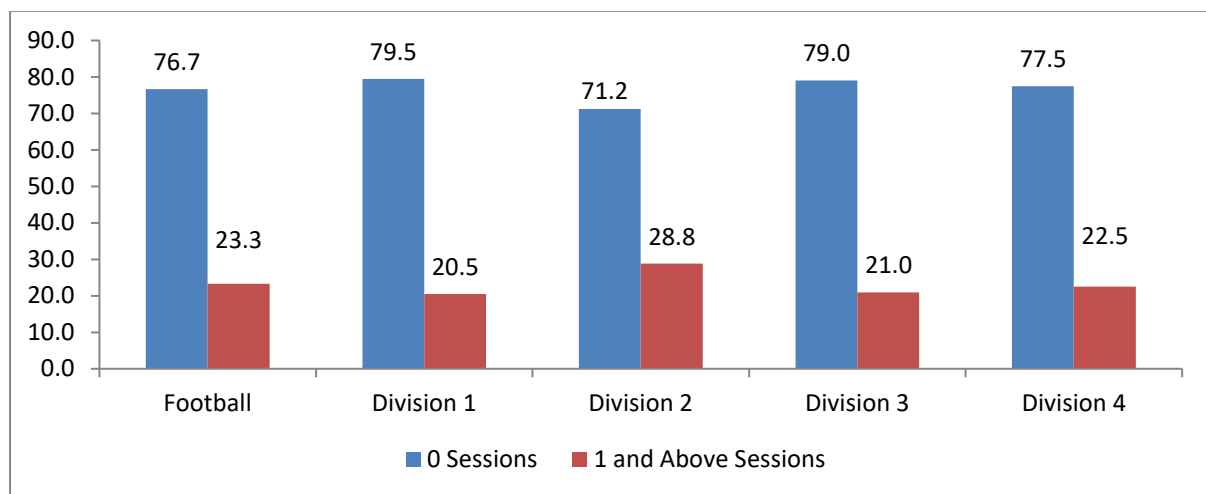
**FIGURE C.12.2 NUMBER OF TRAINING SESSIONS/GAMES WITH OTHER GAELIC TEAMS DURING A 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: HURLERS**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

There was very little difference among footballers in this regard (Figure C.12.3).

**FIGURE C.12.3 NUMBER OF TRAINING SESSIONS/GAMES WITH OTHER GAELIC TEAMS DURING A 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: GAELIC FOOTBALLERS**

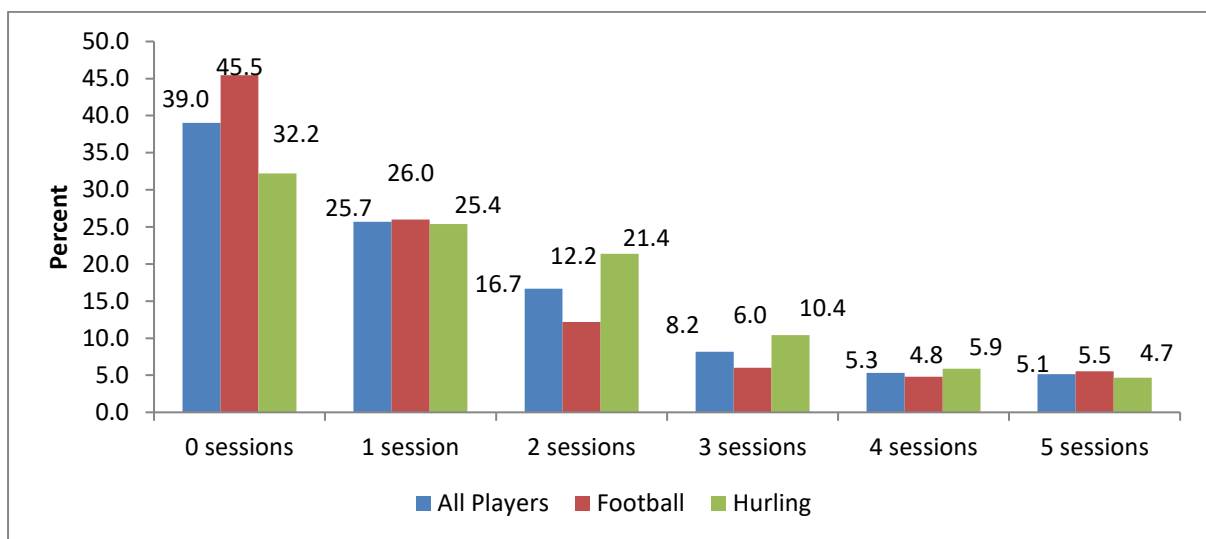


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

### **Number of other Gaelic team training sessions/games: inter-county non-match week**

During a week when 2016 players did not have a championship match, a larger proportion of players undertook at least one training/match with their other Gaelic team (Figure C.12.4): 61 per cent compared to 33 per cent during an inter-county match week. Again, this figure was higher among hurlers: 68 per cent compared to 55 per cent of footballers.

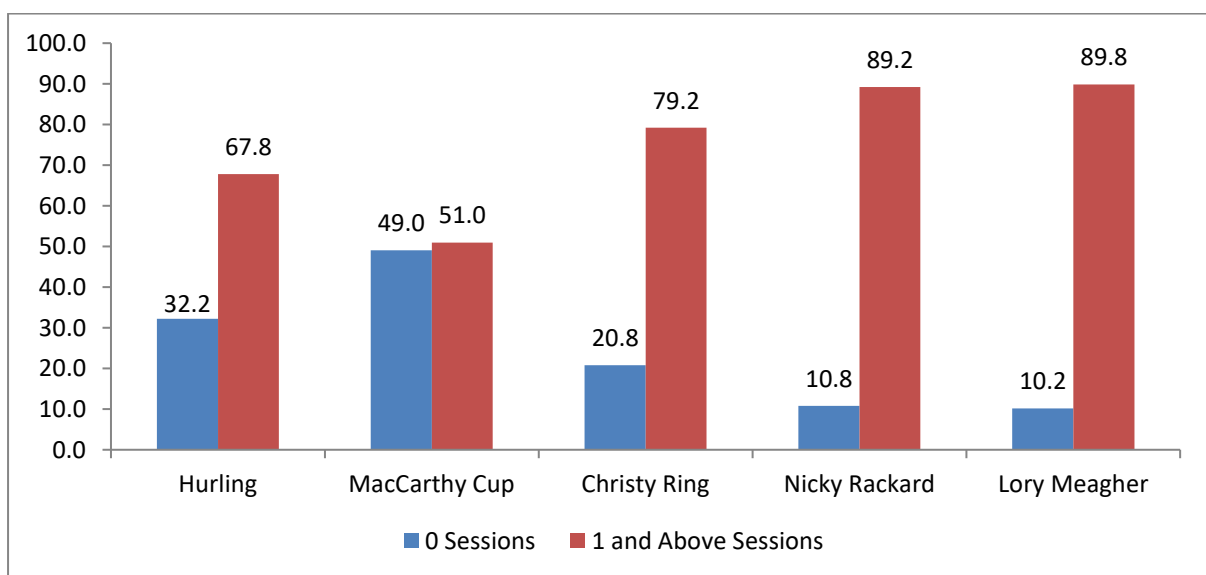
**FIGURE C.12.4 NUMBER OF TRAINING SESSIONS/GAMES WITH OTHER GAELIC TEAMS DURING A 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP NON-MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND CODE**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

This was, again, predominantly driven by Christy Ring, Nicky Rackard and Lory Meagher hurlers undertaking at least one training session/playing one game with their other Gaelic team during weeks when they had no inter-county championship match: 79 per cent of Christy Ring hurlers, 89 per cent of Nicky Rackard and 90 per cent of Lory Meagher players compared to 51 per cent of 2016 MacCarthy Cup hurlers (Figure C.12.5).

**FIGURE C.12.5 NUMBER OF TRAINING SESSIONS/GAMES WITH OTHER GAELIC TEAMS DURING A 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: HURLERS**

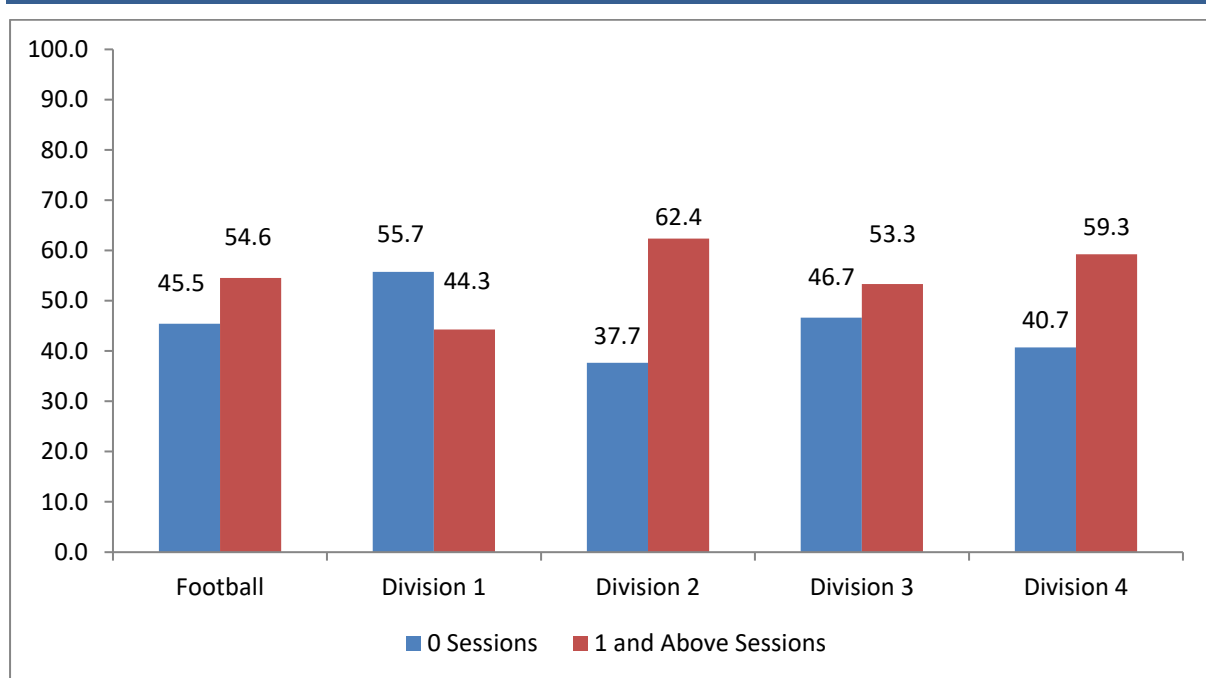


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).



For 2016 footballers (Figure C.12.6), there was also an increase in the proportion of players across all football levels who undertook at least one training session/game with their other Gaelic team during weeks when they did not have an inter-county championship match – up to 55 per cent from 23 per cent during a match week. This increase mainly took place among the Division 2 to 4 footballers as opposed to the top-tier footballers (i.e. Division 1 players): 62 per cent among Division 2 footballers, 53 per cent for Division 3 and 59 per cent for Division 4 compared to 44 per cent of Division 1 players.

**FIGURE C.12.6 NUMBER OF TRAINING SESSIONS/GAMES WITH OTHER GAELIC TEAMS DURING A 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: GAELIC FOOTBALLERS**

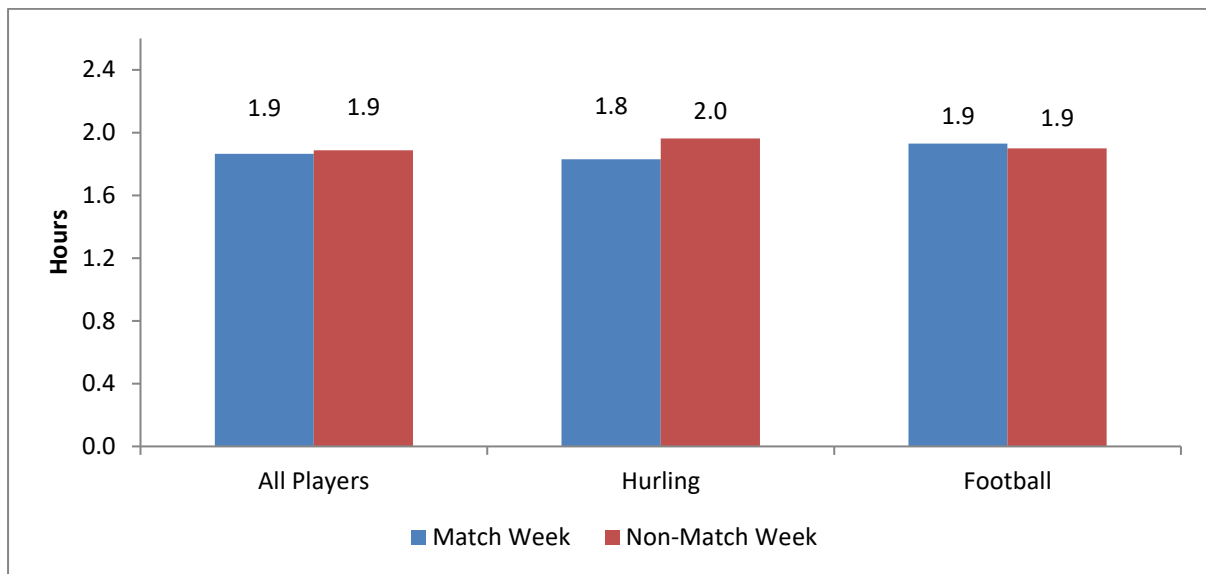


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

### **Duration of other Gaelic team training sessions/games: inter-county match week**

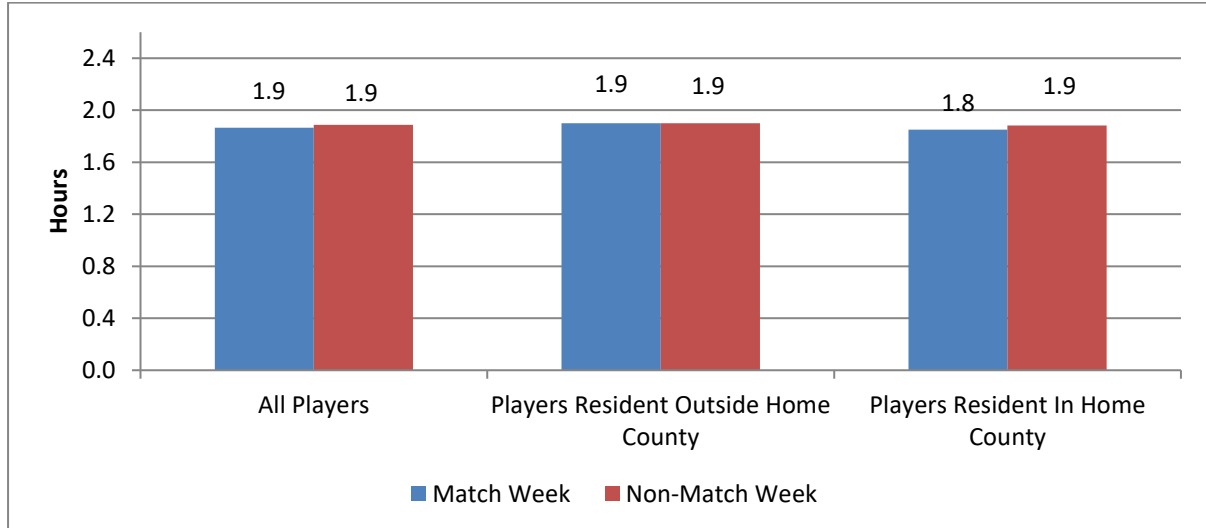
As indicated in Section 4.2, the average length of a training session/game with the other Gaelic team that some 2016 senior inter-county players trained/played with during the inter-county championship was 1.9 hours: this was the length of this session regardless of whether it was an inter-county match or non-match week. This was no statistical difference in this average session duration by code (Figure C.12.7) or by players' residence (Figure C.12.8).

**FIGURE C.12.7 DURATION OF TRAINING SESSIONS/GAMES WITH OTHER GAE LIC TEAMS DURING THE 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP: OVERALL AND CODE**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

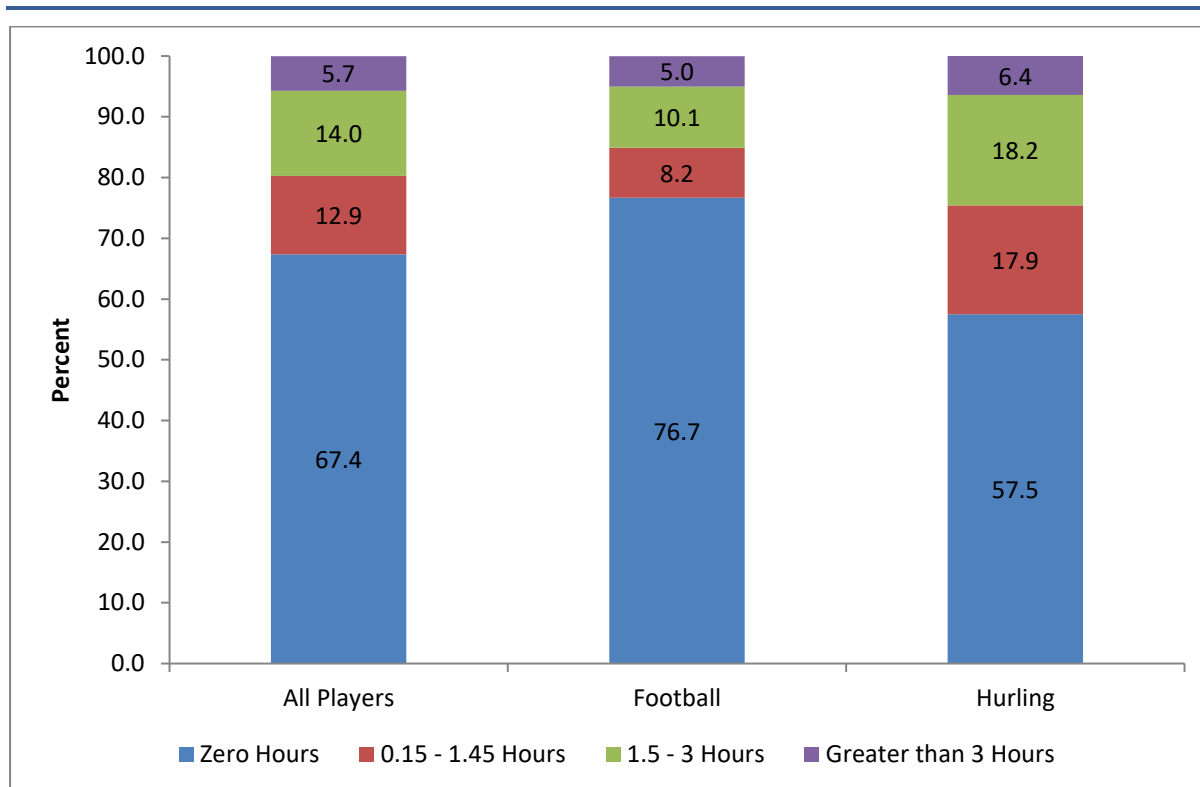
**FIGURE C.12.8 DURATION OF TRAINING SESSIONS/GAMES WITH OTHER GAE LIC TEAMS DURING THE 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP: OVERALL AND PLAYERS' RESIDENCE**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

As indicated previously, 67 per cent of 2016 players did not play/train with their other Gaelic team the week of an inter-county match. For the 33 per cent that did, 13 per cent trained/played with their other Gaelic team for up to 1.45 hours the week of an inter-county match, 14 per cent for between 1.5 and 3 hours, and 6 per cent for greater than three hours (Figure C.12.9).

**FIGURE C.12.9 BREAKDOWN OF THE NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO TRAINING SESSIONS/GAMES WITH OTHER GAELIC TEAMS DURING A 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND CODE**



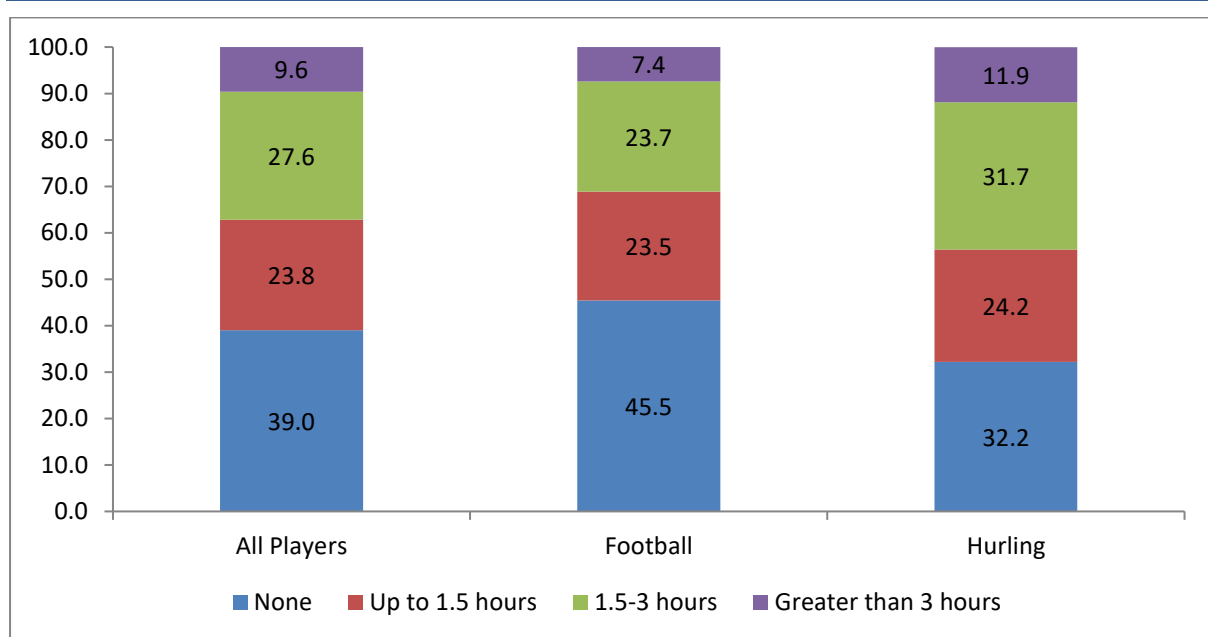
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Given that a greater proportion of hurlers played/trained with their other Gaelic team the week of an inter-county match, most of whom were Christy Ring, Nicky Rackard and Lory Meagher players, greater percentages of these players allocated up to three hours of training/game time to their other team (Figure C.12.9): 36 per cent compared to 18 per cent of 2016 footballers.

#### **Duration of other Gaelic team training sessions/games: inter-county non-match week**

In relation to an inter-county non-match week, we mentioned previously that the percentage of 2016 players who allocated no time to their other Gaelic team on such weeks was 39 per cent (down from 67 per cent during a match week). Of the remaining 61 per cent of players, 24 per cent allocated up to 1.45 hours to a training session/game with their other Gaelic team that week; 28 per cent between 1.5 and 3 hours and 10 per cent more than three hours (Figure C.12.10). A greater percentage of 2016 hurlers allocated more than 1.45 hours to their other Gaelic team during weeks in which there was no inter-county match: 44 per cent compared to 31 per cent of footballers. As indicated previously, most of these hurlers were Christy Ring, Nicky Rackard and Lory Meagher players.

**FIGURE C.12.10 BREAKDOWN OF THE NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO TRAINING SESSIONS/GAMES WITH OTHER GAELIC TEAMS DURING A 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP NON-MATCH WEEK: OVERALL AND CODE (PER CENT)**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

### C.13 24-HOUR TIME ALLOCATION ON A WEEKDAY FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP (LATE MAY/JUNE)

**TABLE C.13.1 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY GAELIC FOOTBALLERS: OVERALL AND LEVEL (HOURS)**

	All Players	Football	Division 1	Division 2	Division 3	Division 4
Professional commitments	7.9	8.1	7.1	8.7	8.1	8.4
Other	2.4	2.3	2.6	2.0	2.3	2.2
Sleep	7.6	7.5	7.7	7.4	7.5	7.6
Inter-county training	2.9	3.0	3.3	3.0	2.9	2.6
Inter-county travel	2.1	2.1	2.1	1.9	2.1	2.2
Inter-county gear/food prep	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>24.0</b>

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**TABLE C.13.2 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY HURLERS: OVERALL AND LEVEL (HOURS)**

	All Players	Hurling	MacCarthy Cup	Christy Ring	Nicky Rackard	Lory Meagher
Professional commitments	7.9	7.8	7.5	7.8	8.6	8.5
Other	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.3	2.6
Sleep	7.6	7.6	7.8	7.5	7.3	7.3
Inter-county training	2.9	2.8	3.0	2.6	2.5	2.3
Inter-county travel	2.1	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.3	2.3
Inter-county gear/food prep	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.0	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>24.0</b>

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

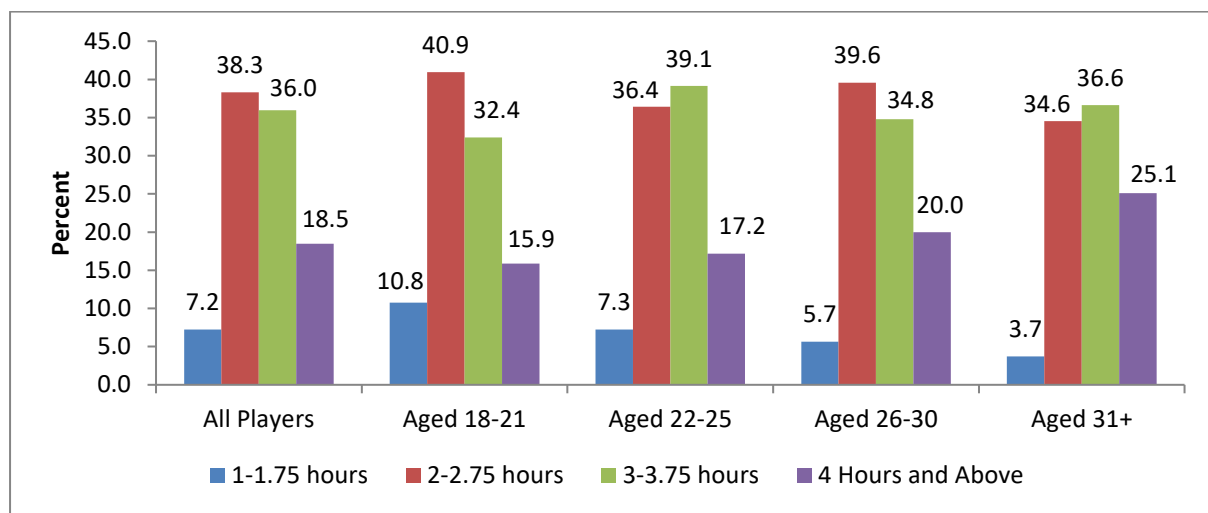
**TABLE C.13.3 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY GAELIC PLAYERS: OVERALL AND AGE CATEGORY (HOURS)**

	All Players	Aged 18–21	Aged 22–25	Aged 26–30	Aged 31+
Professional	7.9	7.1	7.8	8.4	8.9
Other	2.4	3.0	2.4	2.1	1.9
Sleep	7.6	7.8	7.6	7.5	7.2
Inter-county training	2.9	2.7	2.9	2.9	3.1
Inter-county travel	2.1	2.2	2.1	2.0	1.8
Inter-county gear/food prep	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>24.0</b>

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**C.14 BREAKDOWN OF THE NUMBER OF HOURS DEVOTED TO AN INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED TRAINING SESSION DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP (LATE MAY/JUNE)**

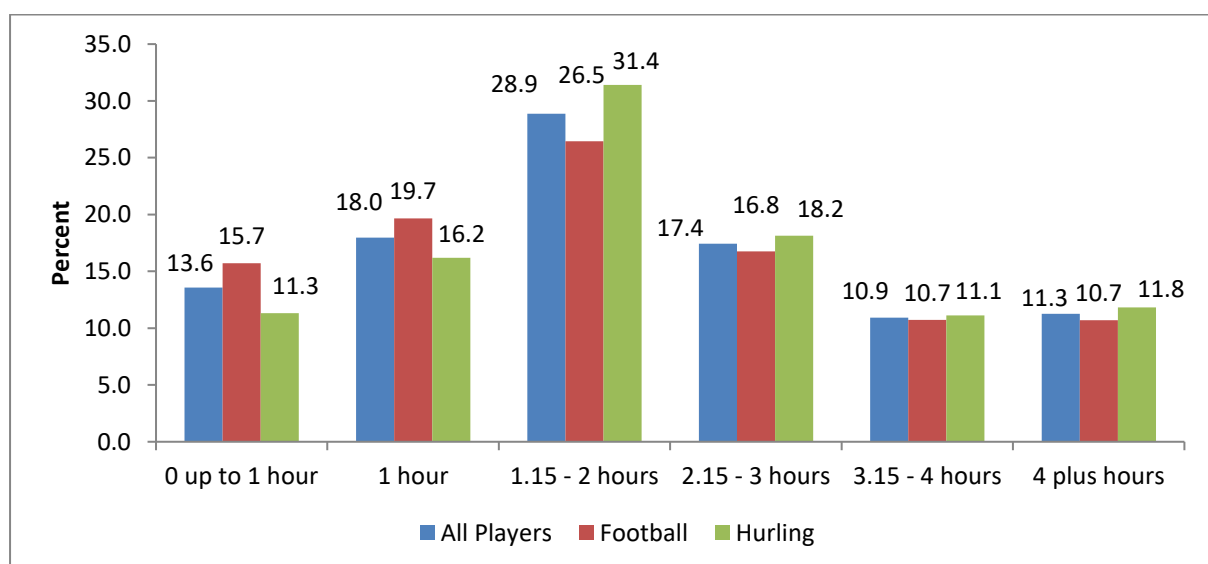
**FIGURE C.14.1 NUMBER OF HOURS DEVOTED TO AN INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED TRAINING SESSION: OVERALL AND AGE GROUP**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**C.15 EXAMINATION OF TIME DEVOTED TO FAMILY, PARTNER, FRIENDS, RELAXING ON AN INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY**

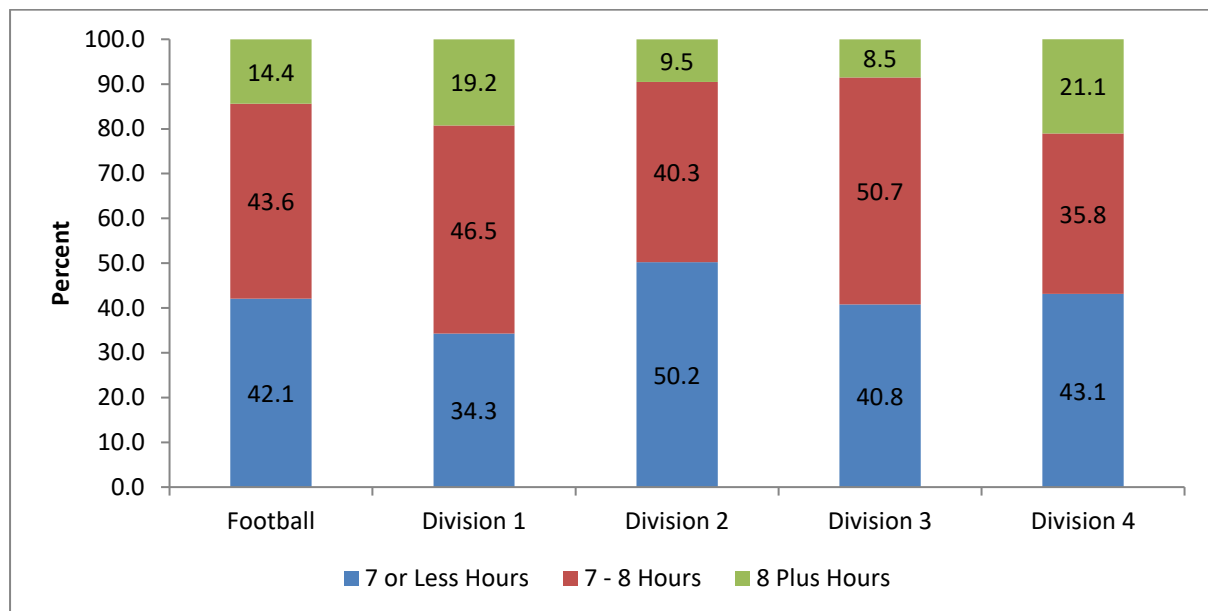
**FIGURE C.15.1 NUMBER OF HOURS 2016 PLAYERS ALLOCATED TO FAMILY, PARTNER, FRIENDS, RELAXING ON A FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY: OVERALL AND CODE**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

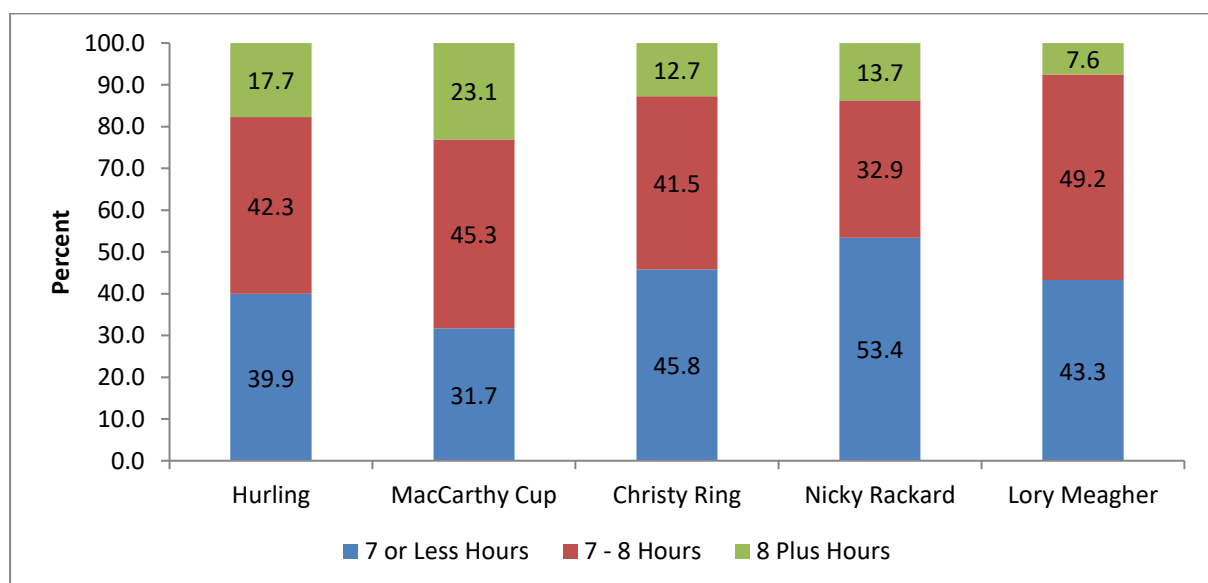
### C.16 EXAMINATION OF TIME DEVOTED TO SLEEP ON AN INTER-COUNTY FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY

**FIGURE C.16.1** NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO SLEEP BY 2016 GAELIC FOOTBALLERS ON A FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY: OVERALL AND PLAYING LEVEL



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

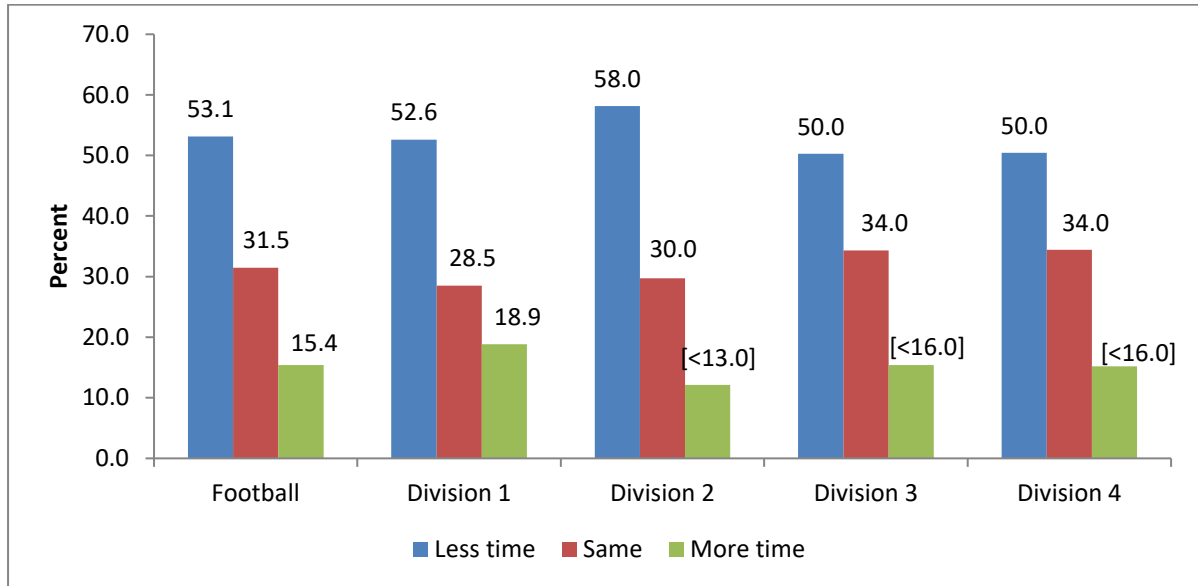
**FIGURE C.16.2** NUMBER OF HOURS ALLOCATED TO SLEEP BY 2016 HURLERS ON A FIELD-BASED TRAINING DAY: OVERALL AND PLAYING LEVEL



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

### C.17 EXAMINATION OF TIME COMMITMENTS ACROSS THE 2016 GAELIC SEASONS: PRE-SEASON, NATIONAL LEAGUE AND CHAMPIONSHIP

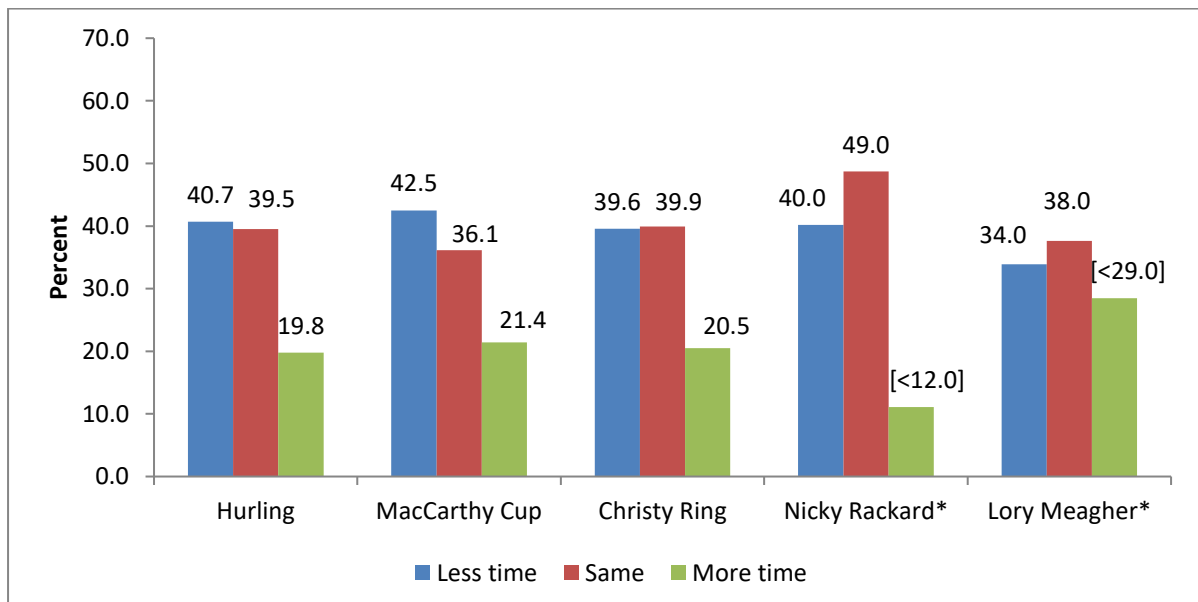
**FIGURE C.17.1 TIME SPENT BY 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS ON INTER-COUNTY COMMITMENTS DURING THE PRE-SEASON COMPARED TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP: GAELIC FOOTBALLERS**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

**FIGURE C.17.2 TIME SPENT BY 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS ON INTER-COUNTY COMMITMENTS DURING THE PRE-SEASON COMPARED TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP: HURLERS**

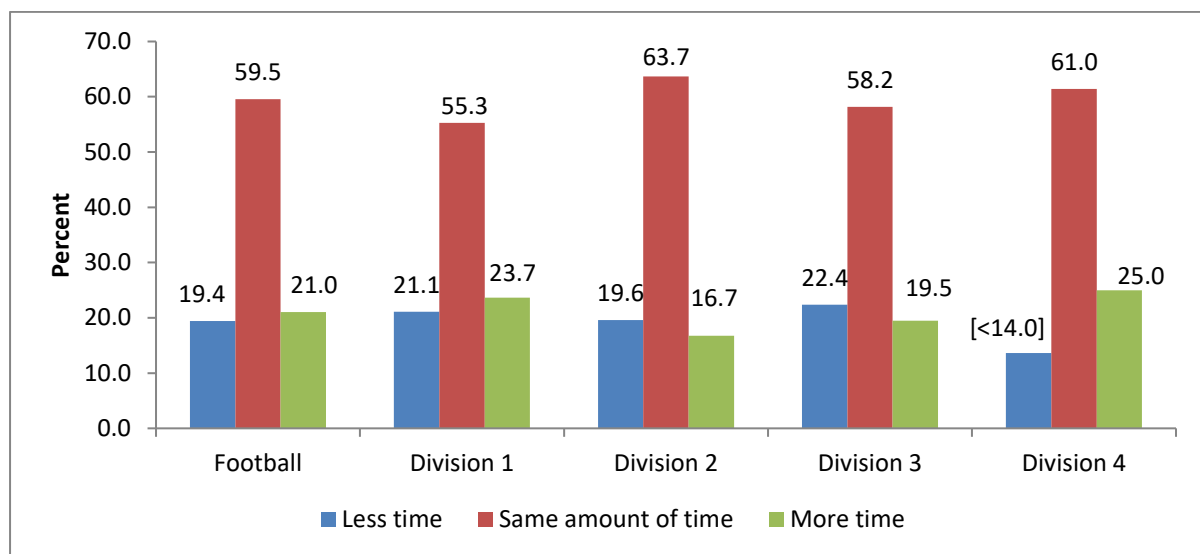


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.



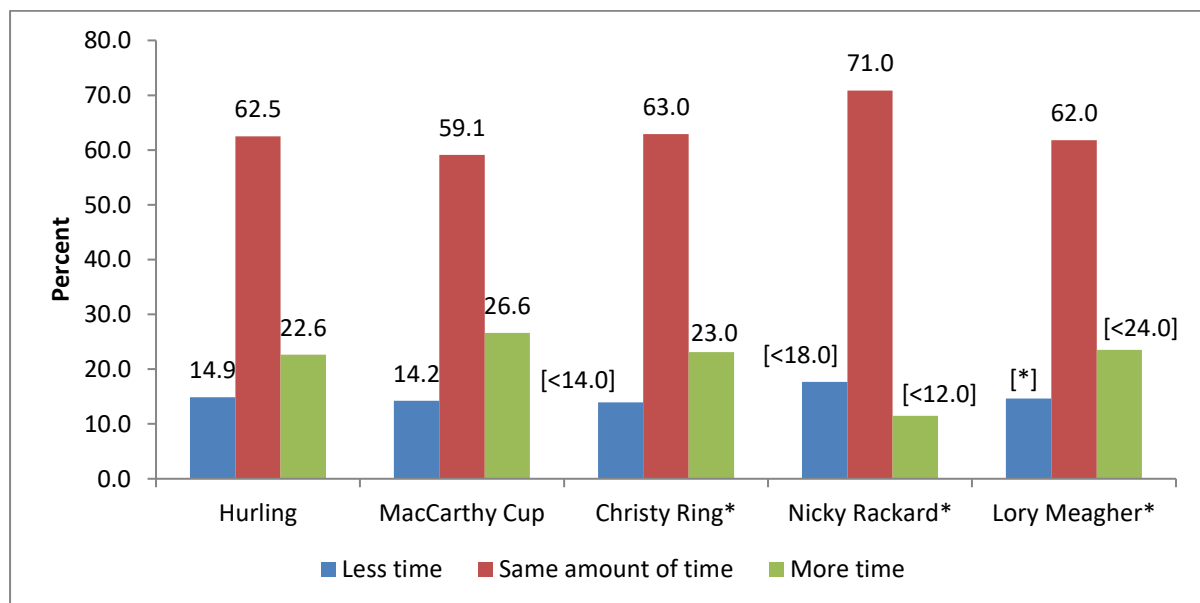
**FIGURE C.17.3 TIME SPENT BY 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS ON INTER-COUNTY COMMITMENTS DURING THE NATIONAL LEAGUE COMPARED TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP: GAELIC FOOTBALLERS**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

**FIGURE C.17.4 TIME SPENT BY 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS ON INTER-COUNTY COMMITMENTS DURING THE NATIONAL LEAGUE COMPARED TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP: HURLERS**



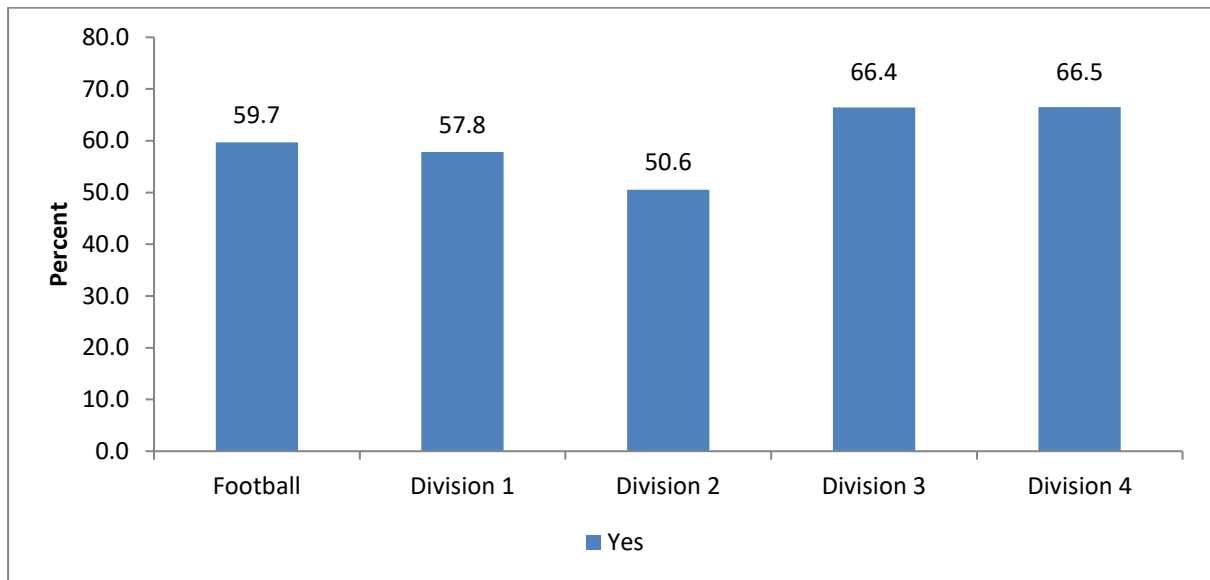
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

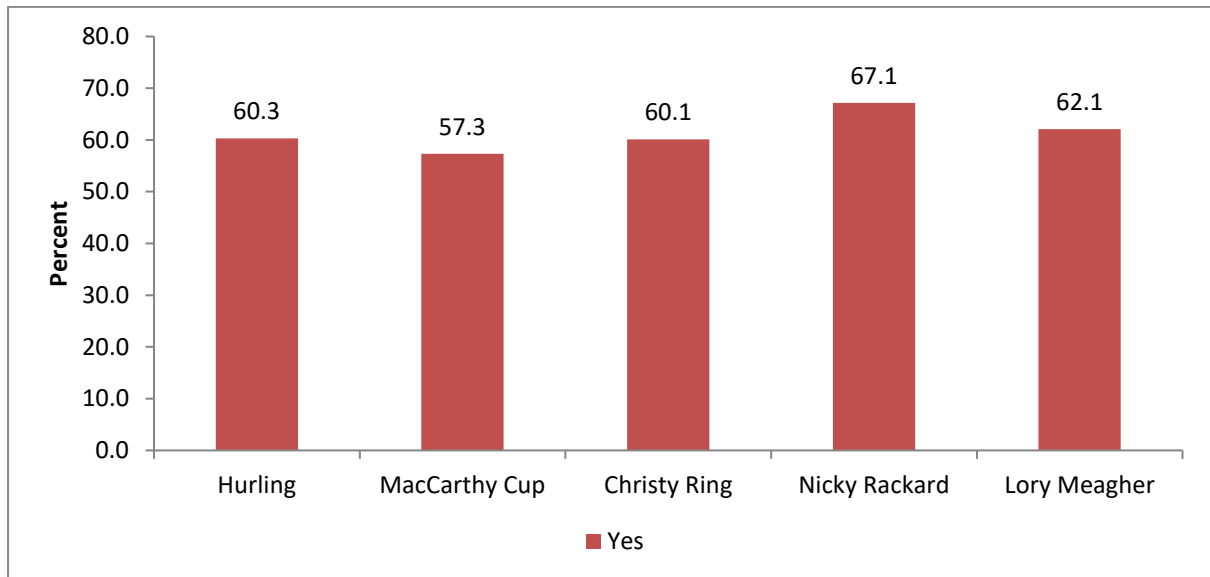
### C.18 EXAMINATION OF TIME OFF FROM GAELIC GAMES DURING THE 2016 SEASON

**FIGURE C.18.1 TIME OFF FROM GAELIC GAMES BETWEEN JANUARY AND DECEMBER 2016: GAELIC FOOTBALLERS**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

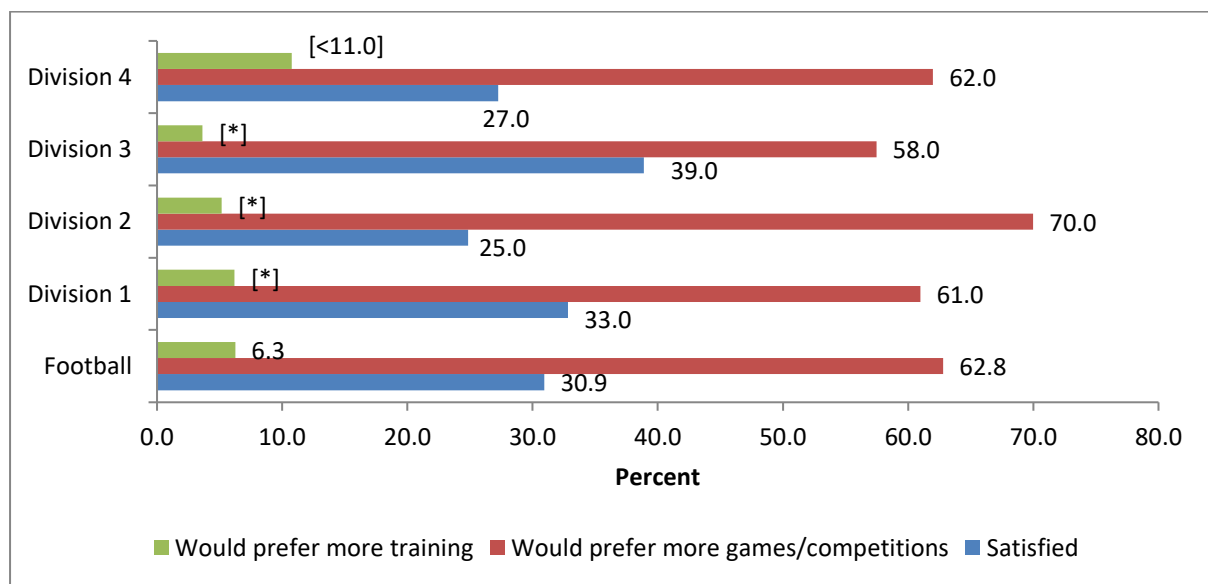
**FIGURE C.18.2 TIME OFF FROM GAELIC GAMES BETWEEN JANUARY AND DECEMBER 2016: HURLERS**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

### C.19 LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH TRAINING TO GAME RATIO DURING THE 2016 GAELIC SEASONS: PRE-SEASON, NATIONAL LEAGUE AND CHAMPIONSHIP

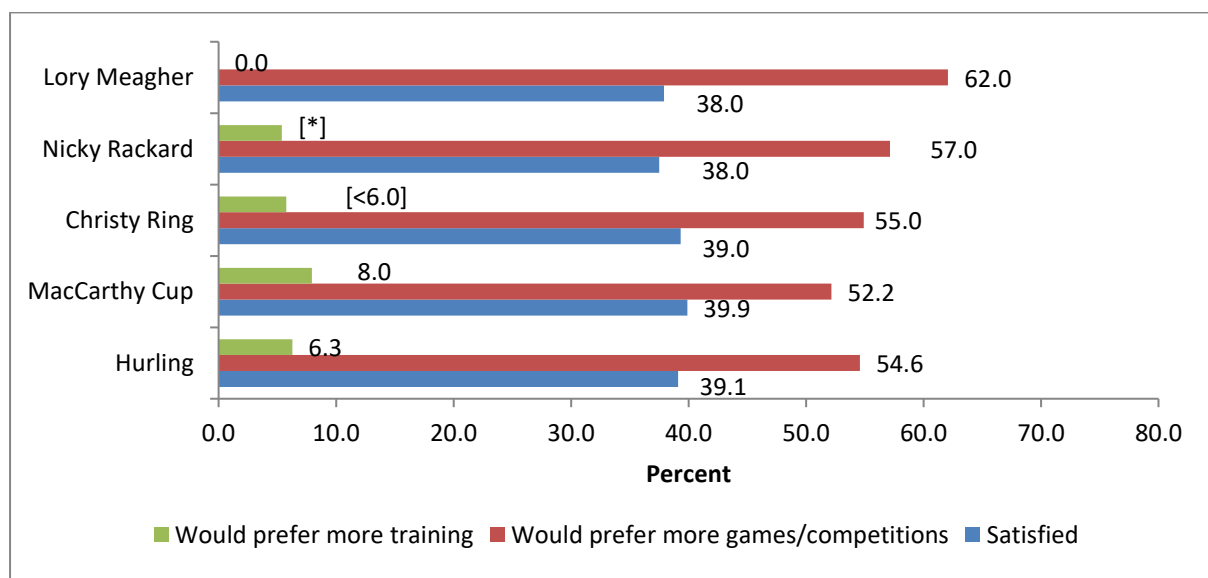
**FIGURE C.19.1 LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE TRAINING TO GAME RATIO DURING THE 2016 PRE-SEASON: GAELIC FOOTBALLERS**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

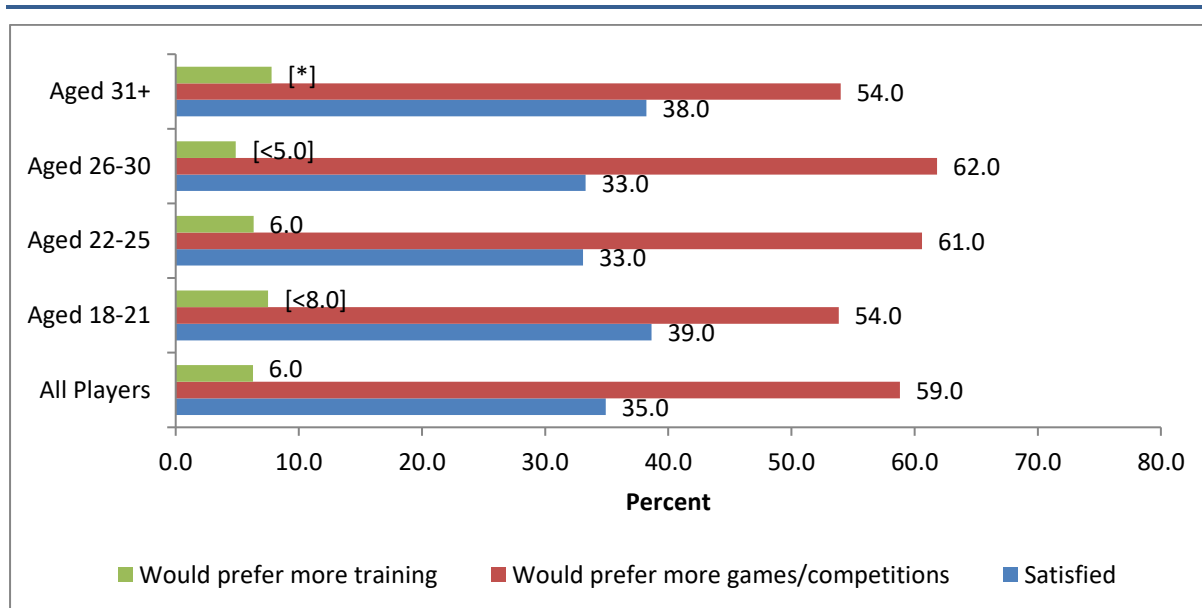
Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution. [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE C.19.2 LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE TRAINING TO GAME RATIO DURING THE 2016 PRE-SEASON: HURLERS**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

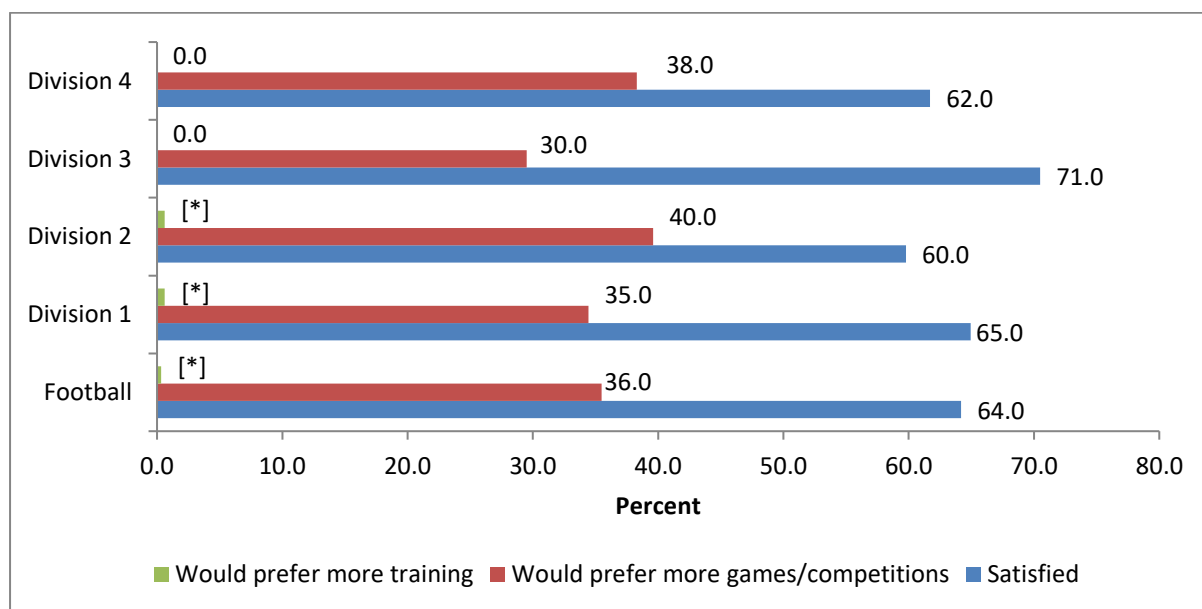
Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution. [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE C.19.3 LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE TRAINING TO GAME RATIO DURING THE 2016 PRE-SEASON: OVERALL AND AGE GROUP**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

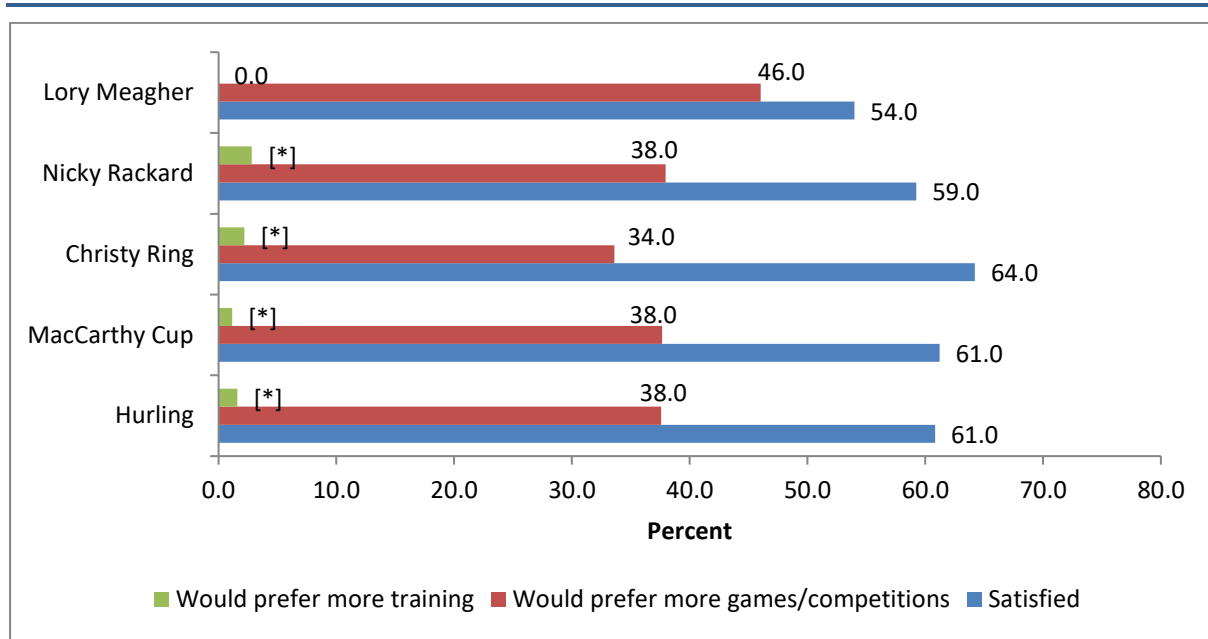
[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE C.19.4 LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE TRAINING TO GAME RATIO DURING THE 2016 NATIONAL LEAGUE: GAELIC FOOTBALLERS**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

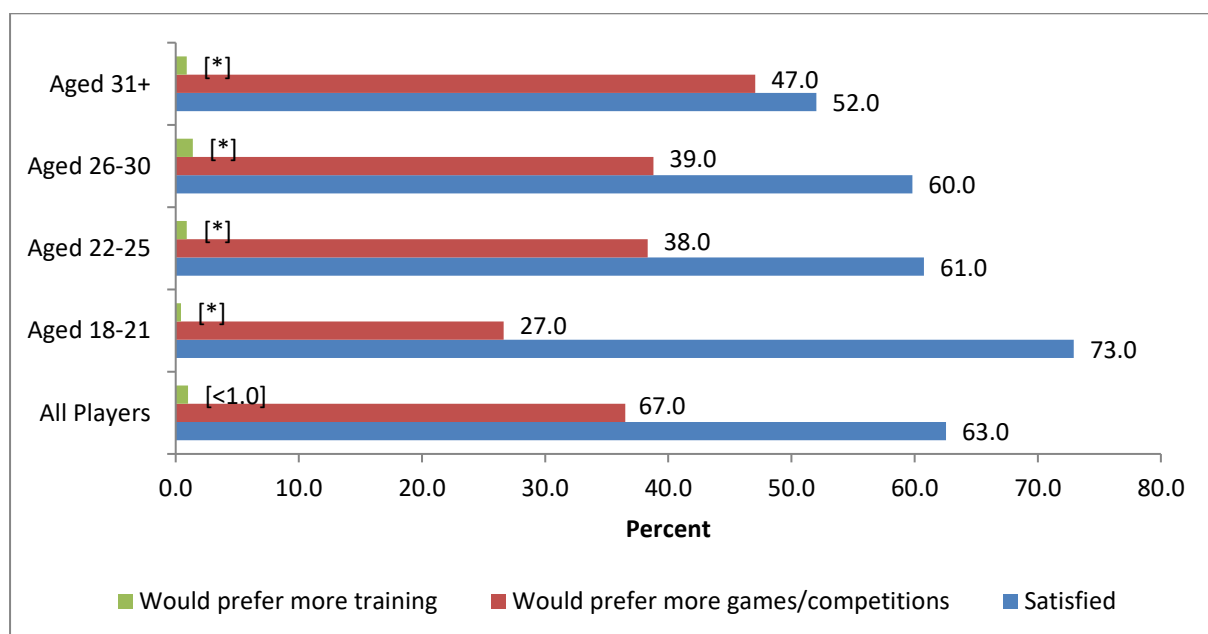
**FIGURE C.19.5 LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE TRAINING TO GAME RATIO DURING THE 2016 NATIONAL LEAGUE: HURLERS**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

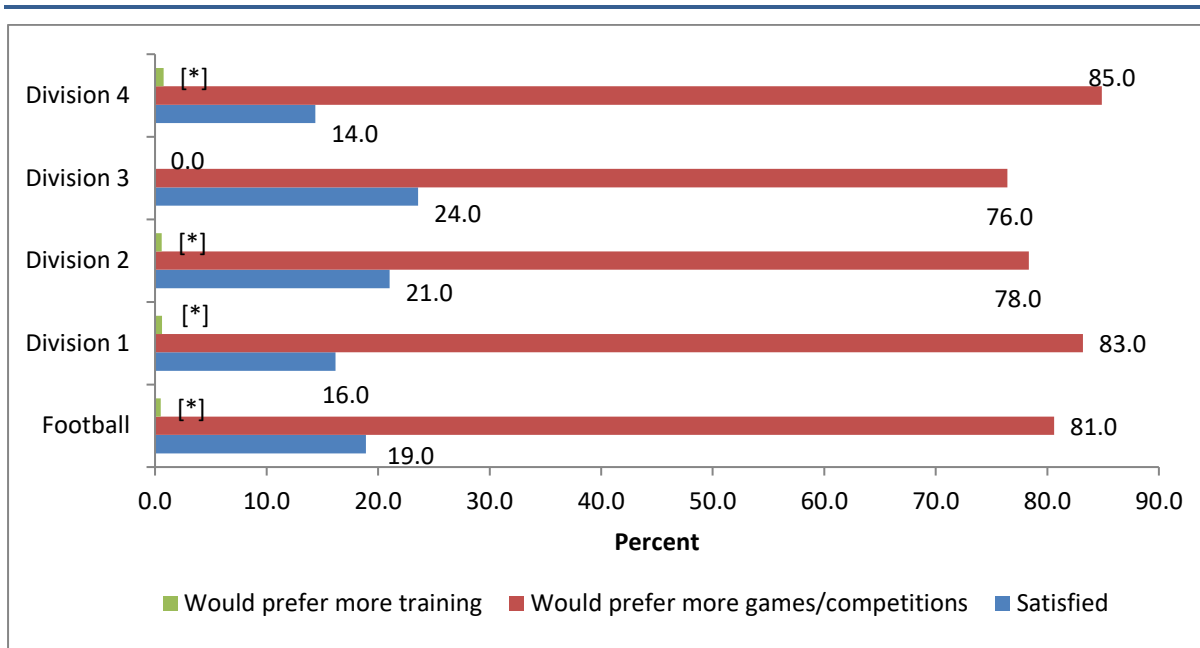
**FIGURE C.19.6 LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE TRAINING TO GAME RATIO DURING THE 2016 NATIONAL LEAGUE: OVERALL AND AGE GROUP**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

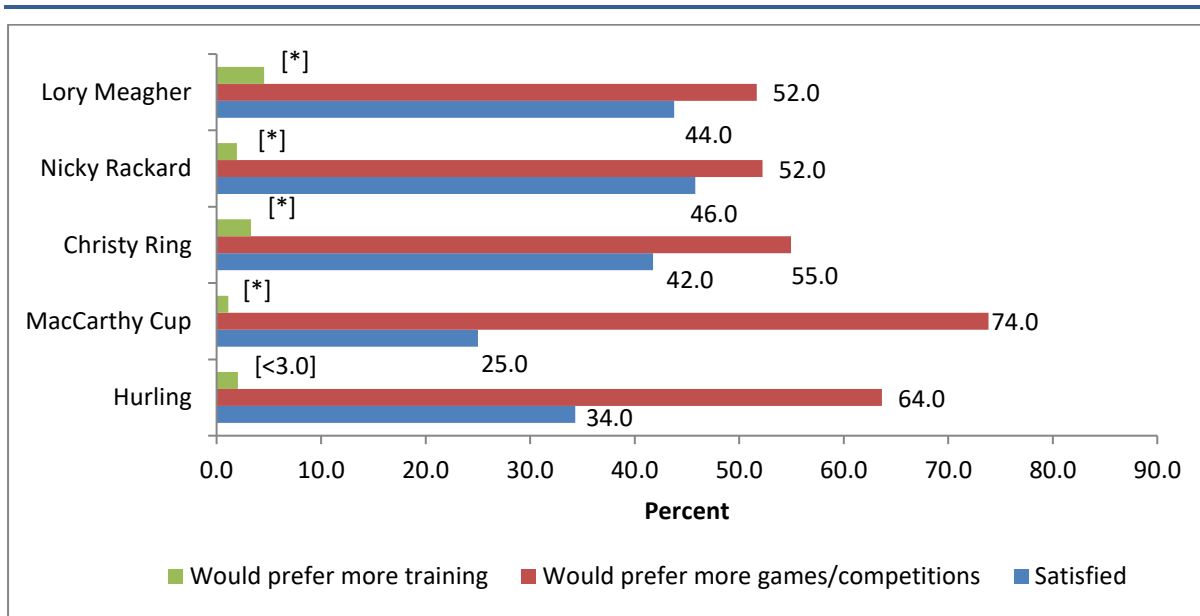
**FIGURE C.19.7 LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE TRAINING TO GAME RATIO DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP: GAELIC FOOTBALLERS**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE C.19.8 LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE TRAINING TO GAME RATIO DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP: HURLERS**

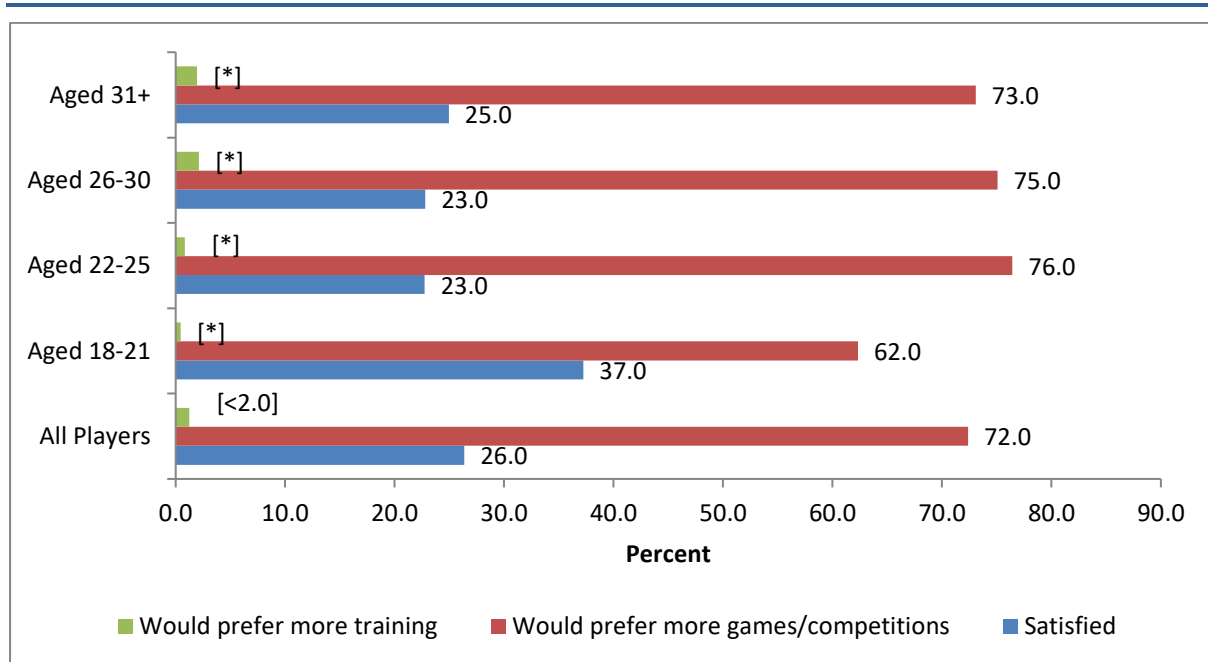


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE C.19.9 LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE TRAINING TO GAME RATIO DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP: OVERALL AND AGE GROUP**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

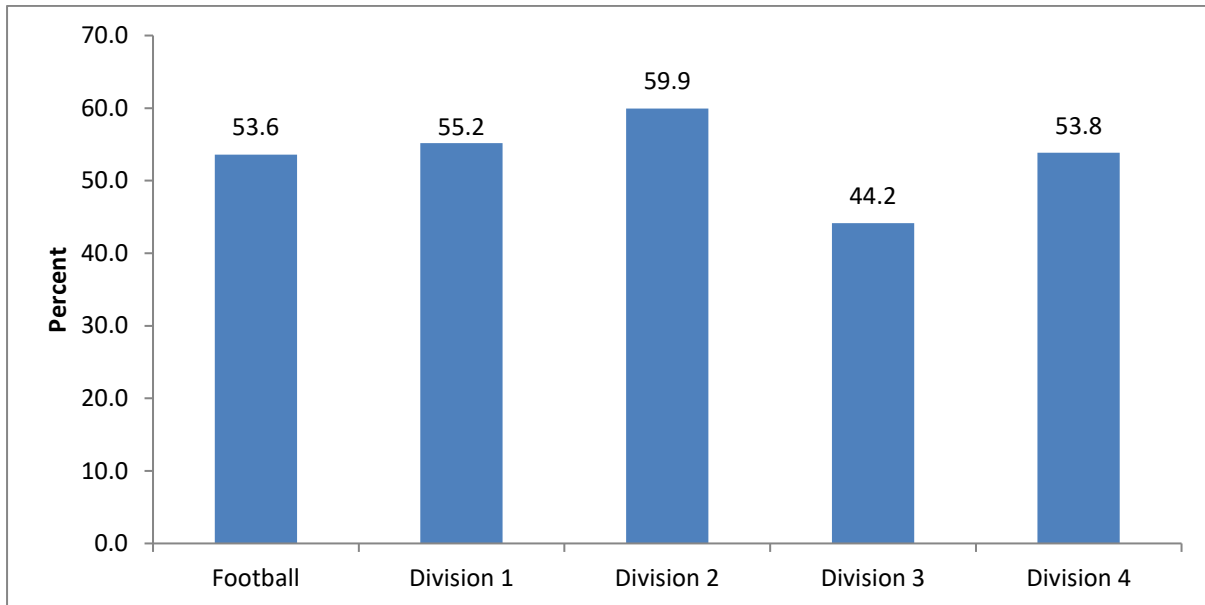
Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

## APPENDIX D: CHAPTER 6 SUPPLEMENTARY WORK

### D.1 EXAMINATION OF THE INCIDENCE AND EFFECTS OF INJURIES AMONG 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS

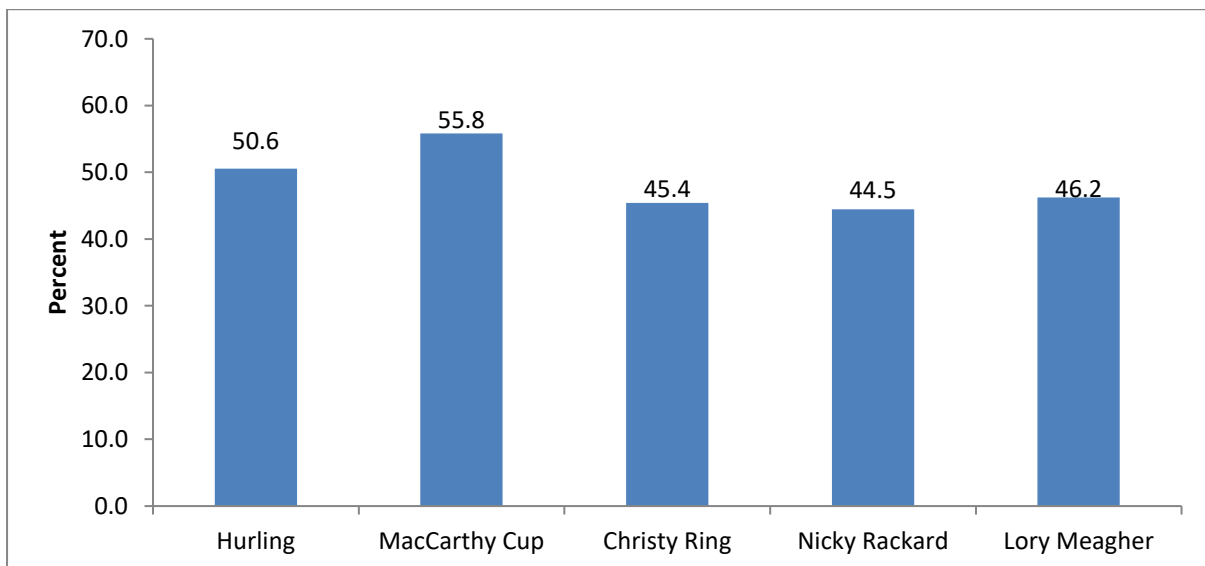
FIGURE D.1.1 INJURY DURING 2016 SEASON: 2016 GAELIC FOOTBALLERS



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The information presented here relates specifically to injuries that required surgery, hospitalisation or time off from training and/or competition.

FIGURE D.1.2 INJURY DURING 2016 SEASON: 2016 HURLERS

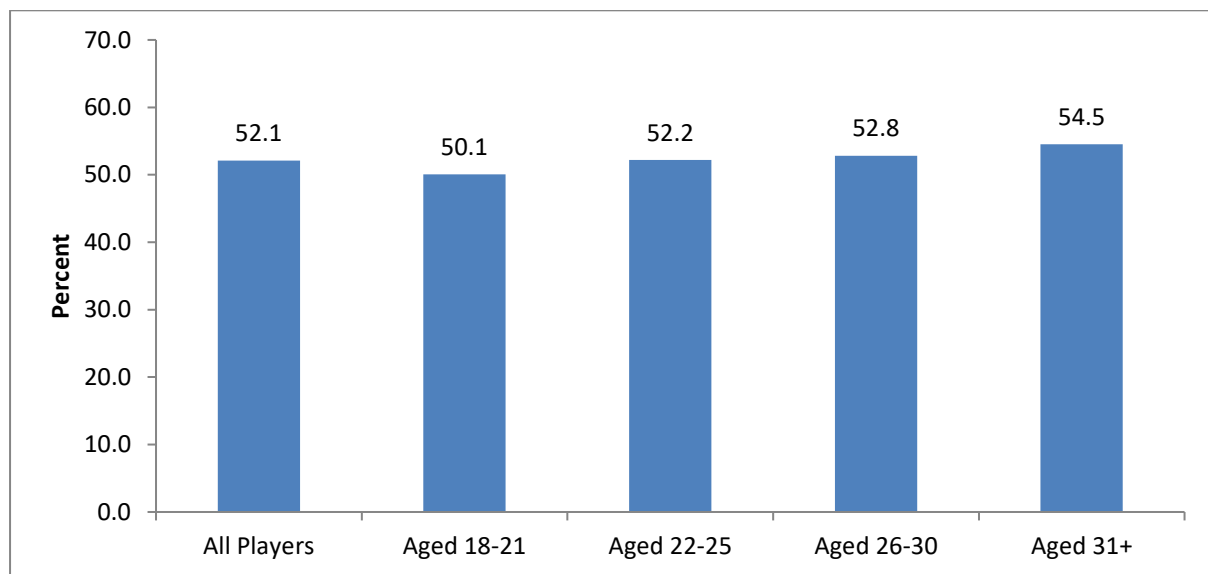


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The information presented here relates specifically to injuries that required surgery, hospitalisation or time off from training and/or competition.



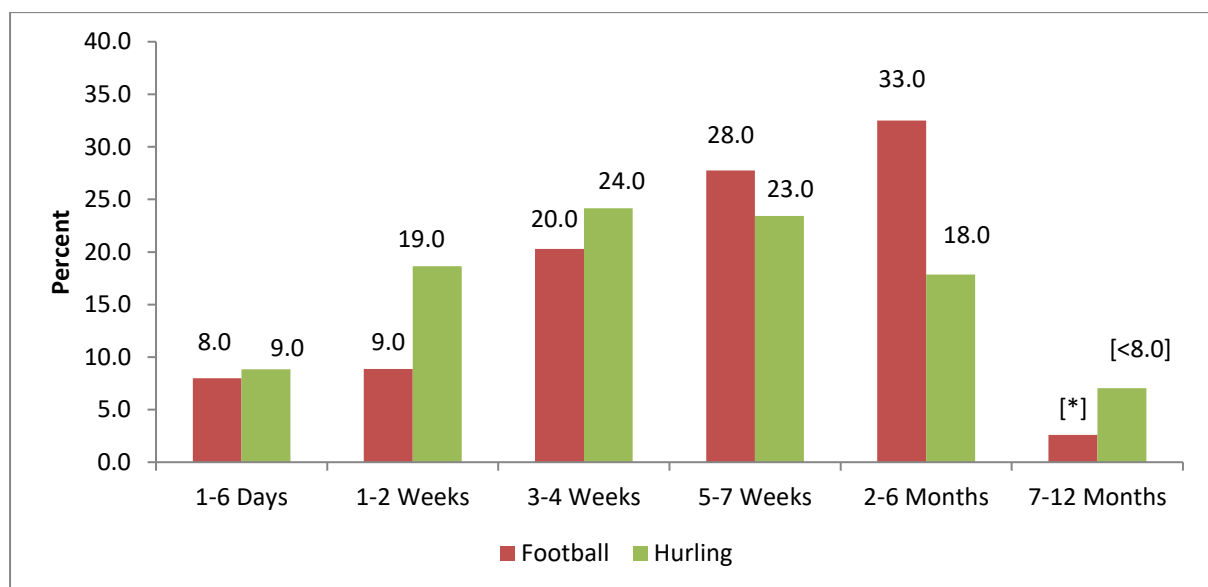
**FIGURE D.1.3 INJURY DURING 2016 SEASON: OVERALL AND AGE GROUP**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The information presented here relates specifically to injuries that required surgery, hospitalisation or time off from training and/or competition.

**FIGURE D.1.4 DURATION ABSENT FROM TRAINING AND/OR PLAYING DUE TO INJURY DURING THE 2016 SEASON: 2016 PLAYERS – CODE**

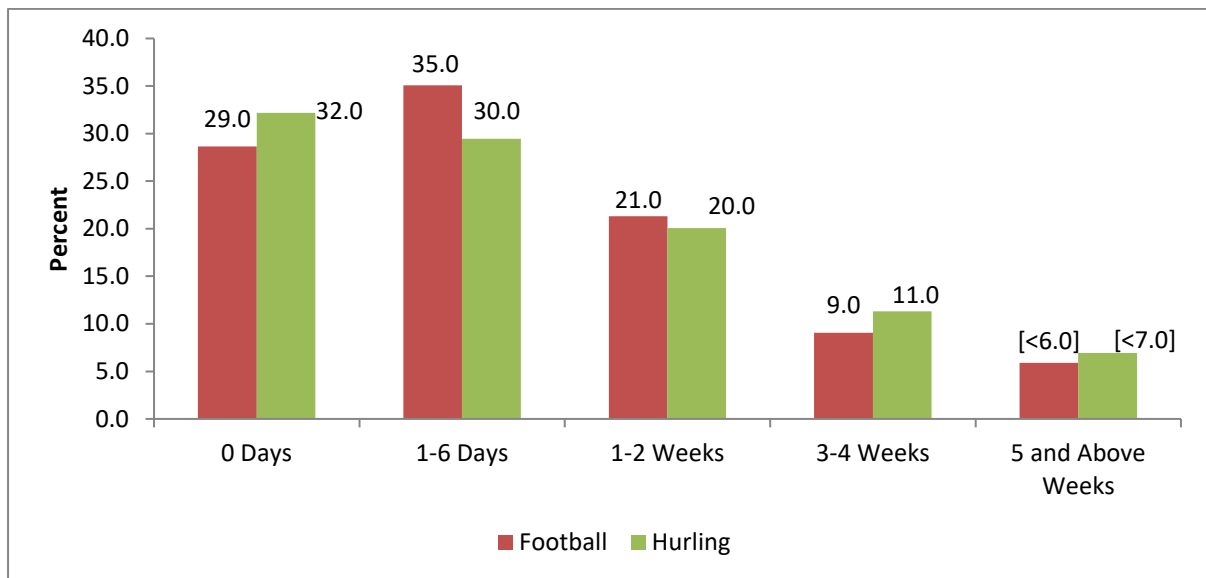


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE D.1.5 DURATION ABSENT FROM WORK/COLLEGE DUE TO INJURY DURING THE 2016 SEASON: 2016 PLAYERS – CODE**

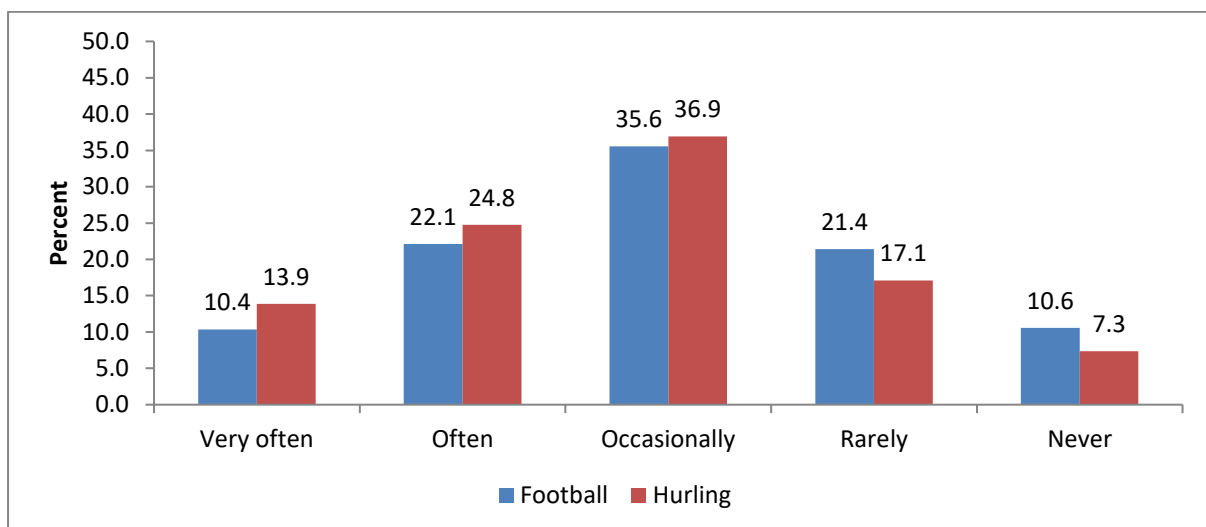


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

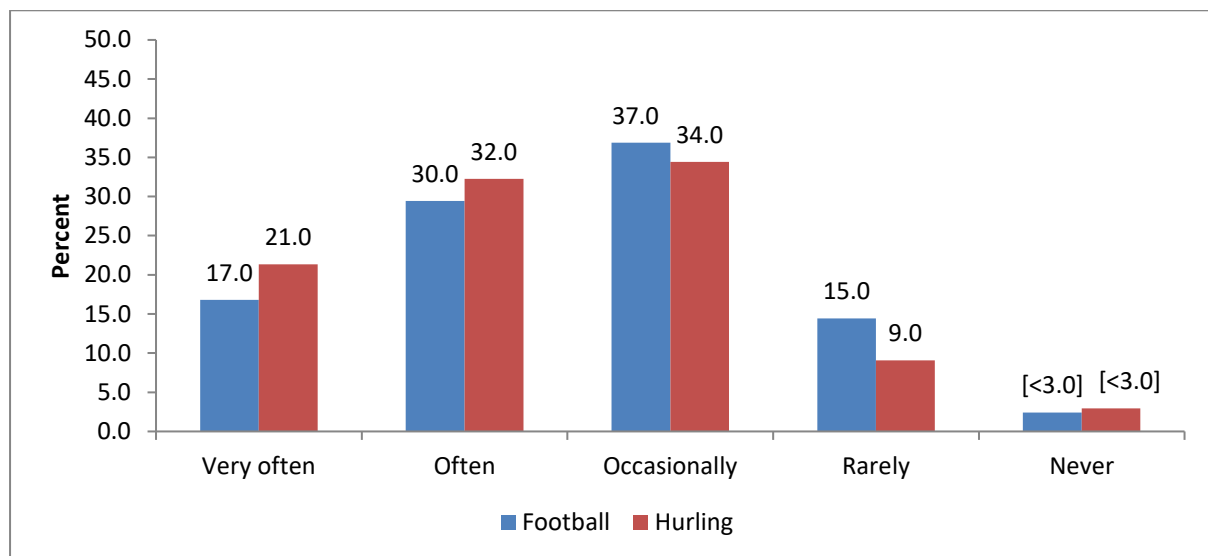
## D.2 PLAYING AND/OR TRAINING WHEN INJURED AMONG 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS

**FIGURE D.2.1 FREQUENCY OF PLAYING INTER-COUNTY MATCHES WHEN INJURED AMONG 2016 PLAYERS: CODE**



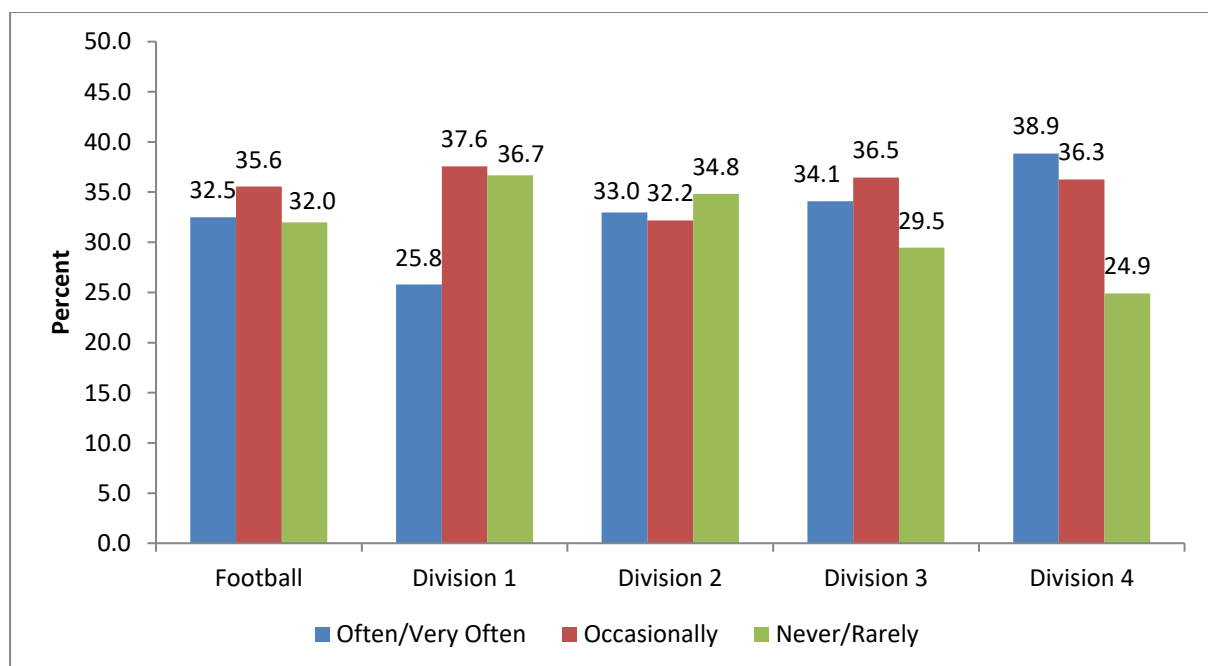
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE D.2.2 FREQUENCY OF PLAYING CLUB MATCHES WHEN INJURED AMONG 2016 PLAYERS: CODE**



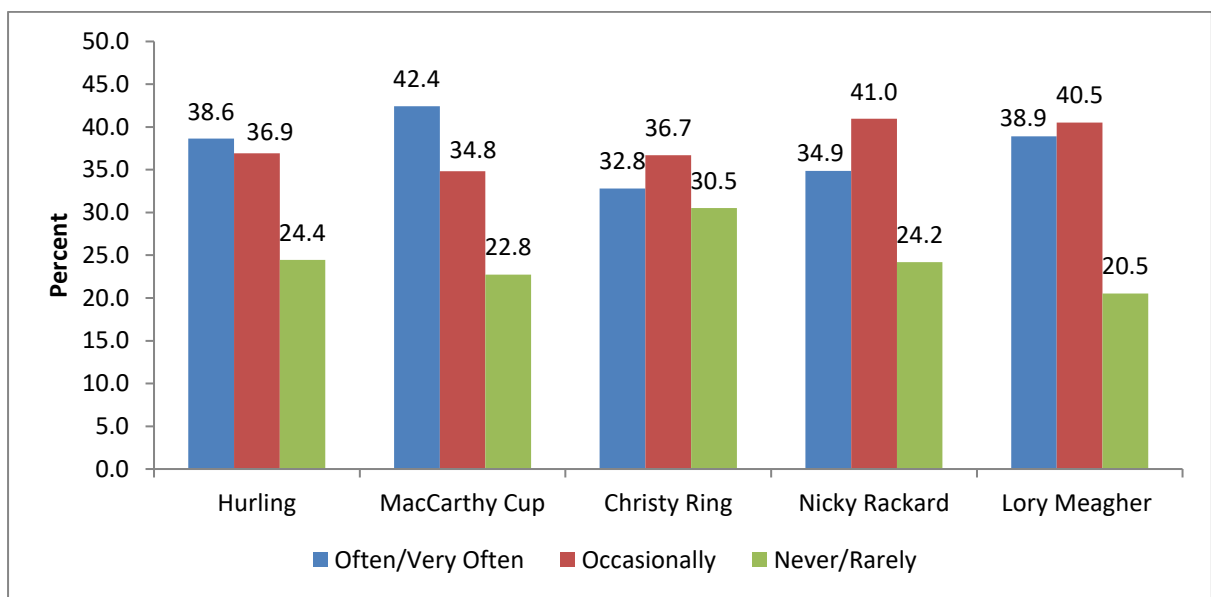
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE D.2.3 FREQUENCY OF PLAYING SENIOR INTER-COUNTY MATCHES WHEN INJURED AMONG 2016 GAEILIC FOOTBALLERS**



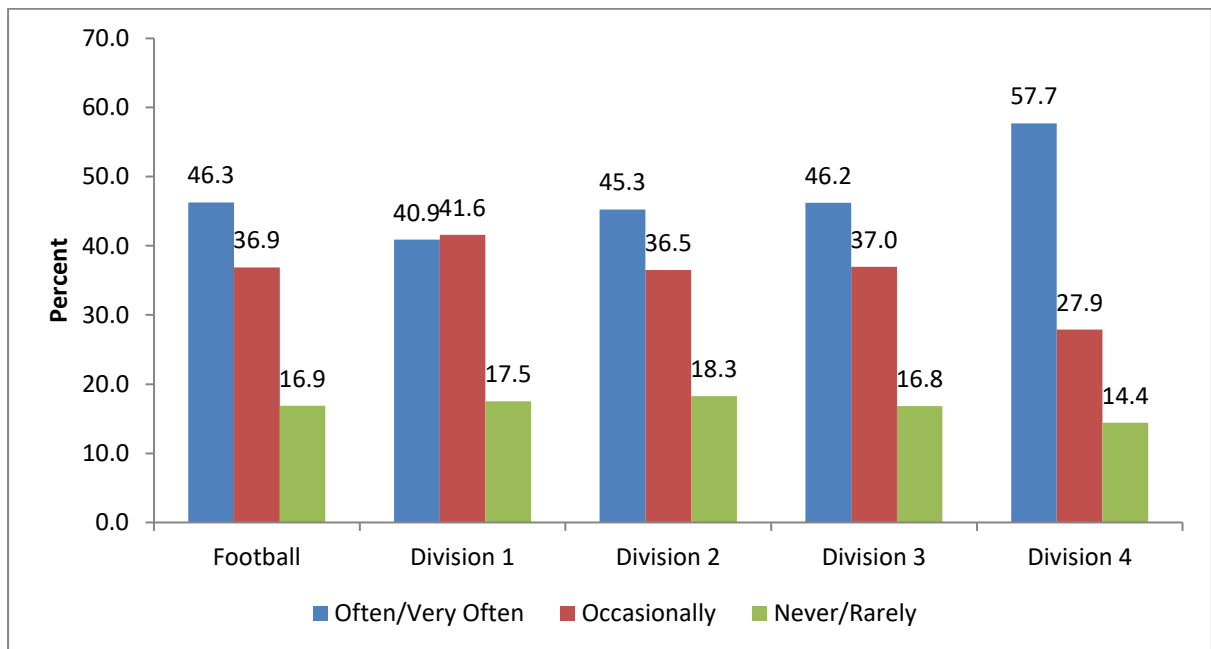
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE D.2.4 FREQUENCY OF PLAYING SENIOR INTER-COUNTY MATCHES WHEN INJURED AMONG 2016 HURLERS**



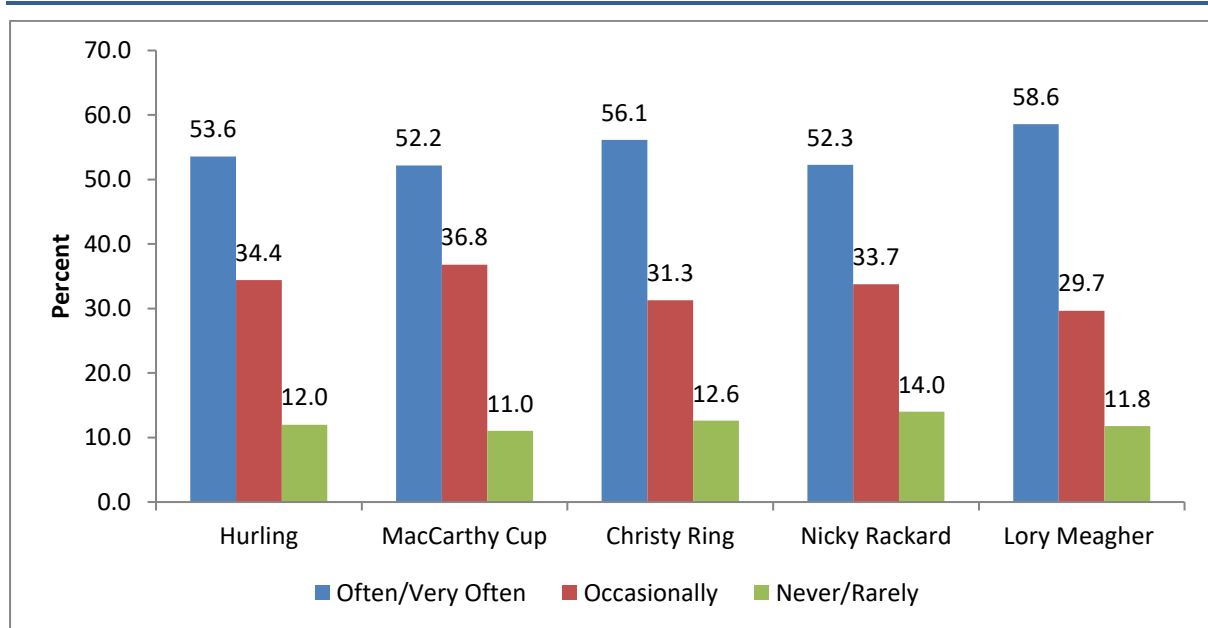
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE D.2.5 FREQUENCY OF PLAYING CLUB MATCHES WHEN INJURED AMONG 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY GAELIC FOOTBALLERS**



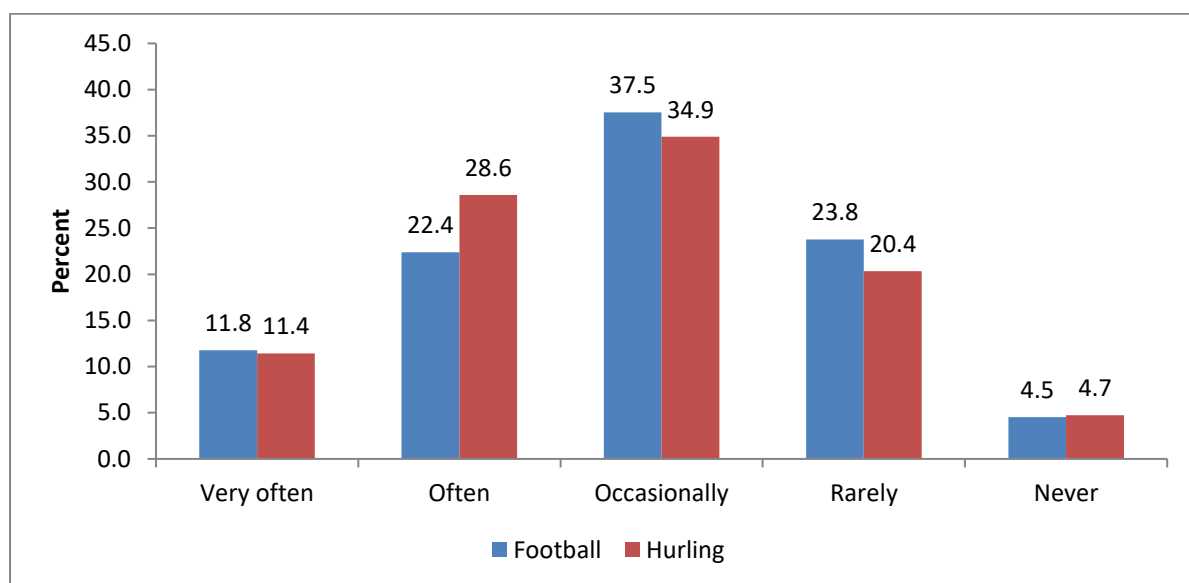
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE D.2.6 FREQUENCY OF PLAYING CLUB MATCHES WHEN INJURED AMONG 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY HURLERS**



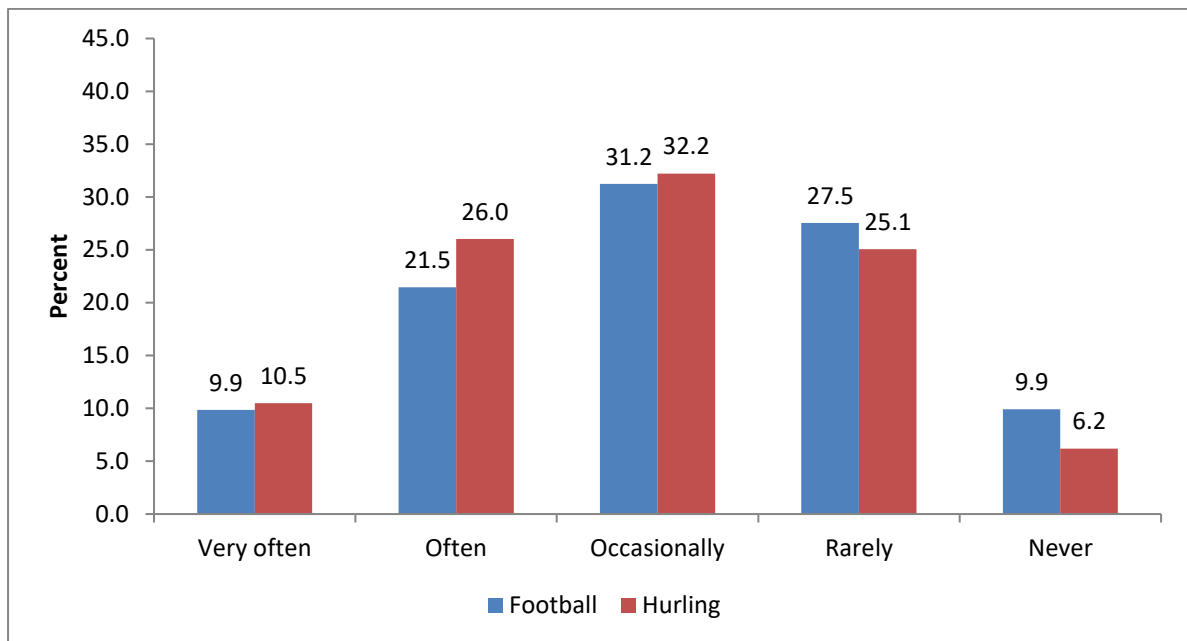
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE D.2.7 FREQUENCY OF TRAINING WITH INTER-COUNTY TEAM WHEN INJURED AMONG 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS: CODE**



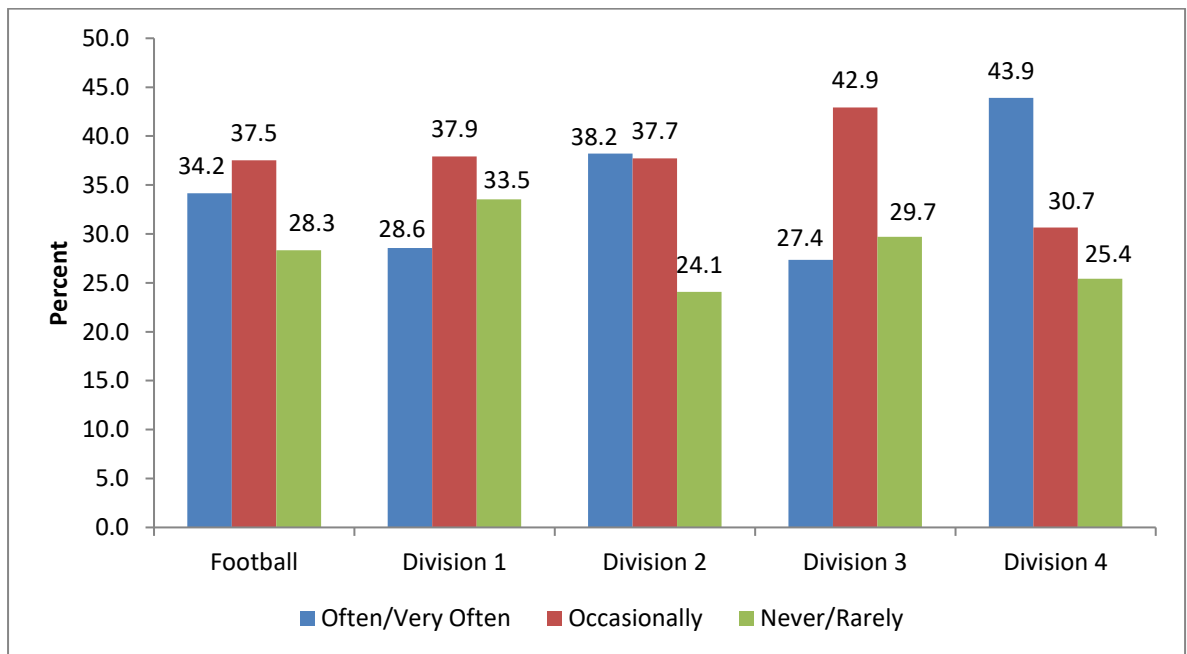
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE D.2.8 FREQUENCY OF TRAINING WITH CLUB TEAM WHEN INJURED AMONG 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS: CODE**



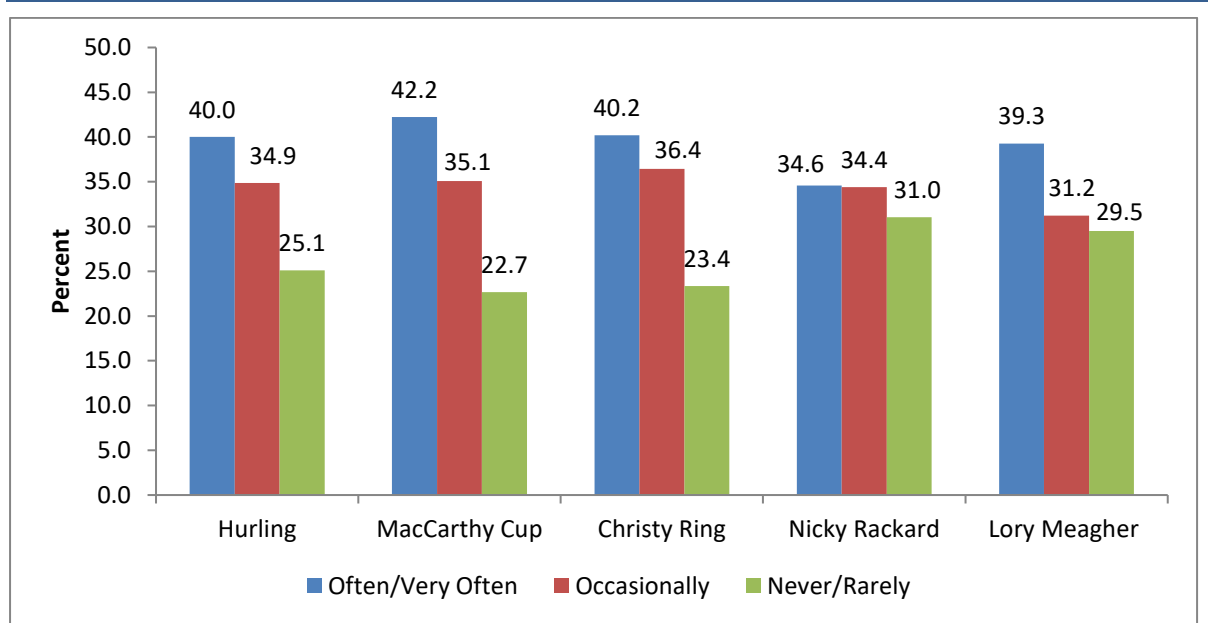
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE D.2.9 FREQUENCY OF TRAINING WITH INTER-COUNTY TEAM WHEN INJURED AMONG 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY GAELIC FOOTBALLERS**



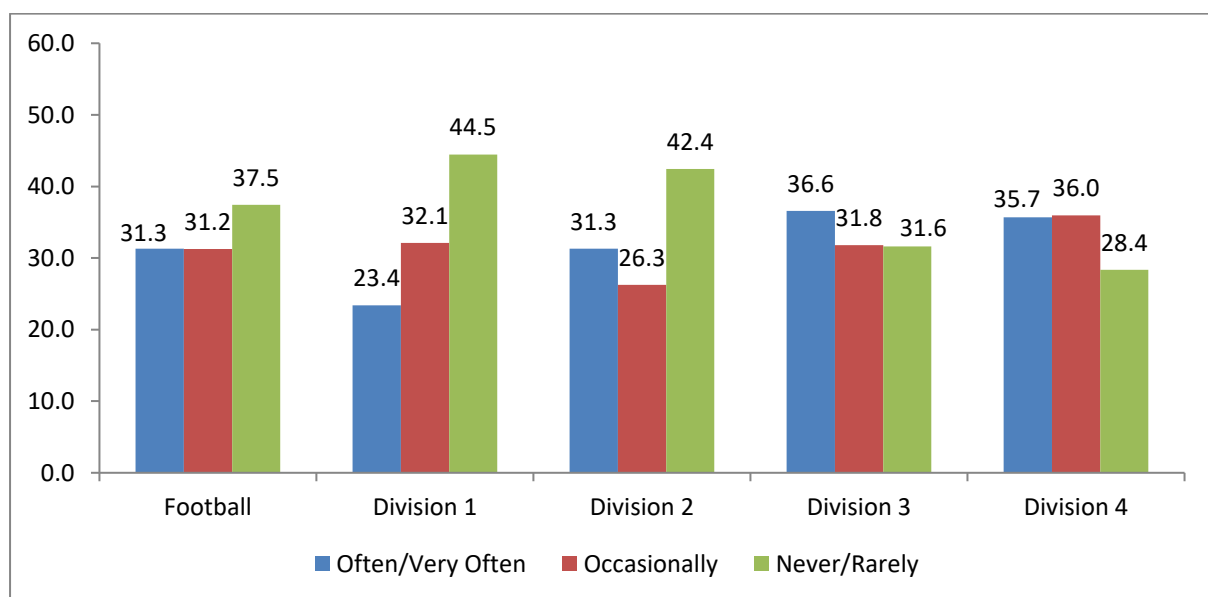
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE D.2.10 FREQUENCY OF TRAINING WITH INTER-COUNTY TEAM WHEN INJURED AMONG 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY HURLERS**



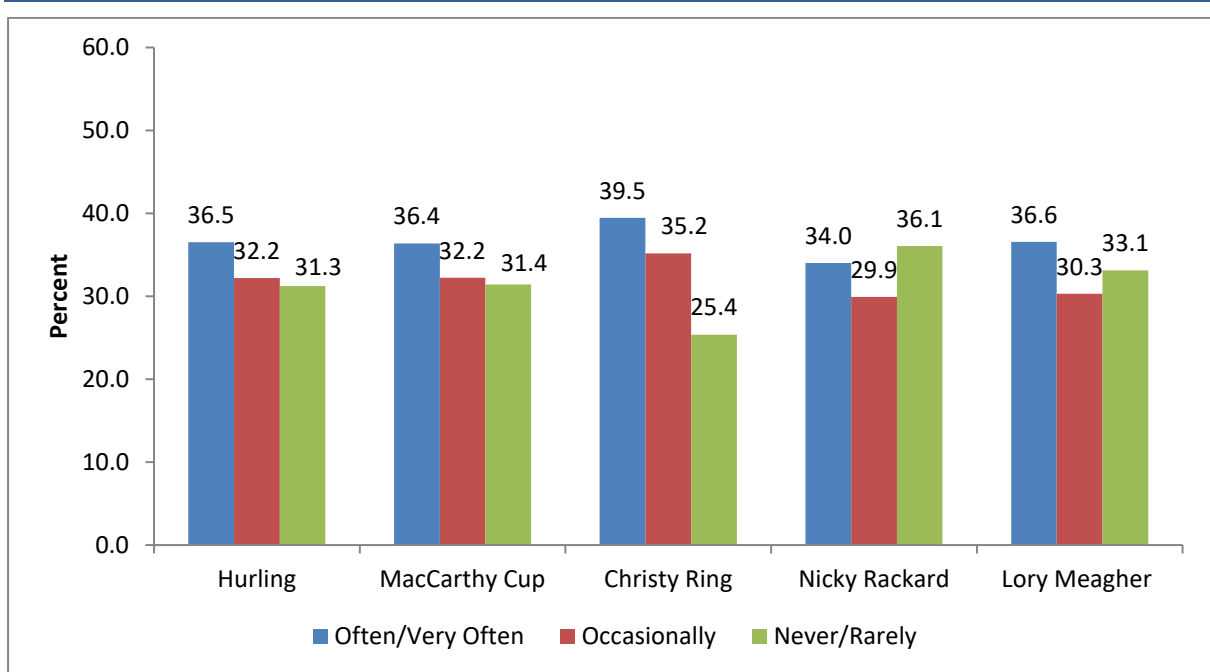
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE D.2.11 FREQUENCY OF TRAINING WITH CLUB TEAM WHEN INJURED AMONG 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY GAELIC FOOTBALLERS (PER CENT)**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

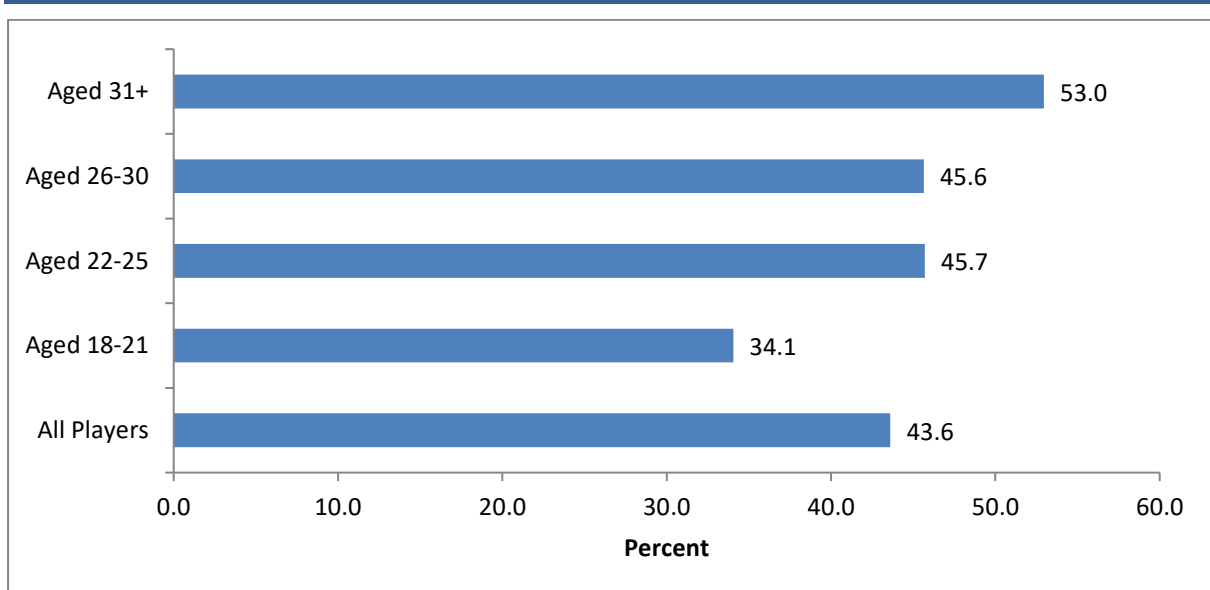
**FIGURE D.2.12 FREQUENCY OF TRAINING WITH CLUB TEAM WHEN INJURED AMONG 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY HURLERS**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

### D.3 PRESSURE TO PLAY WHEN INJURED, MEDICATION AND FINAL DECISION-MAKER

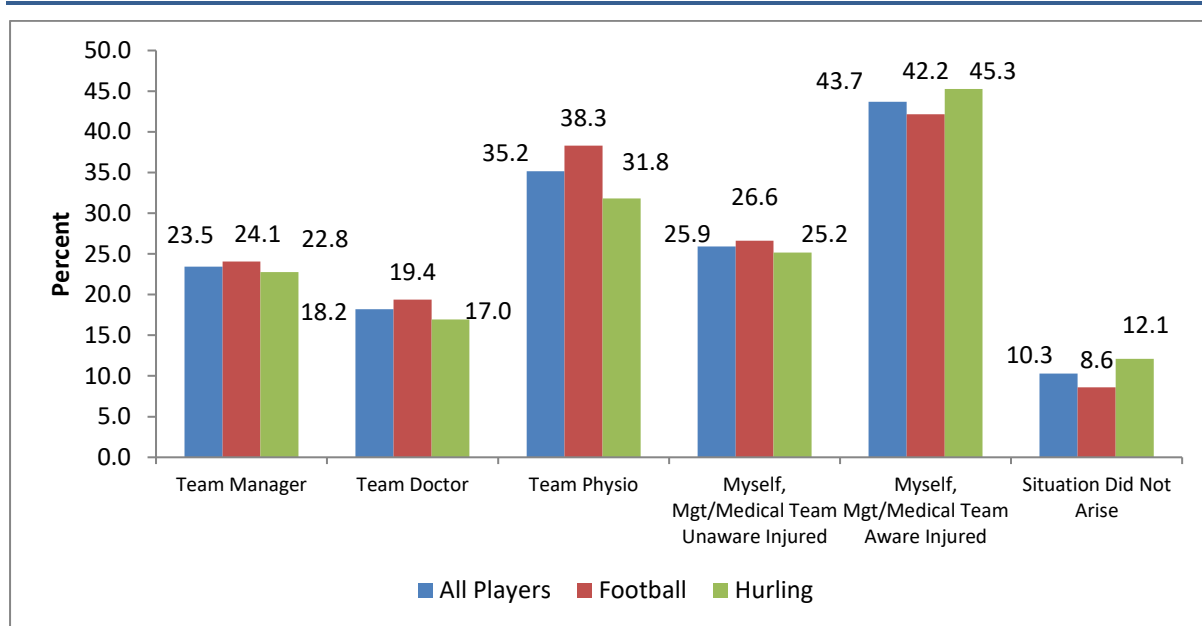
**FIGURE D.3.1 FELT PRESSURED TO PLAY SENIOR INTER-COUNTY GAME WHEN INJURED AMONG 2016 PLAYERS: OVERALL AND AGE GROUP**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).



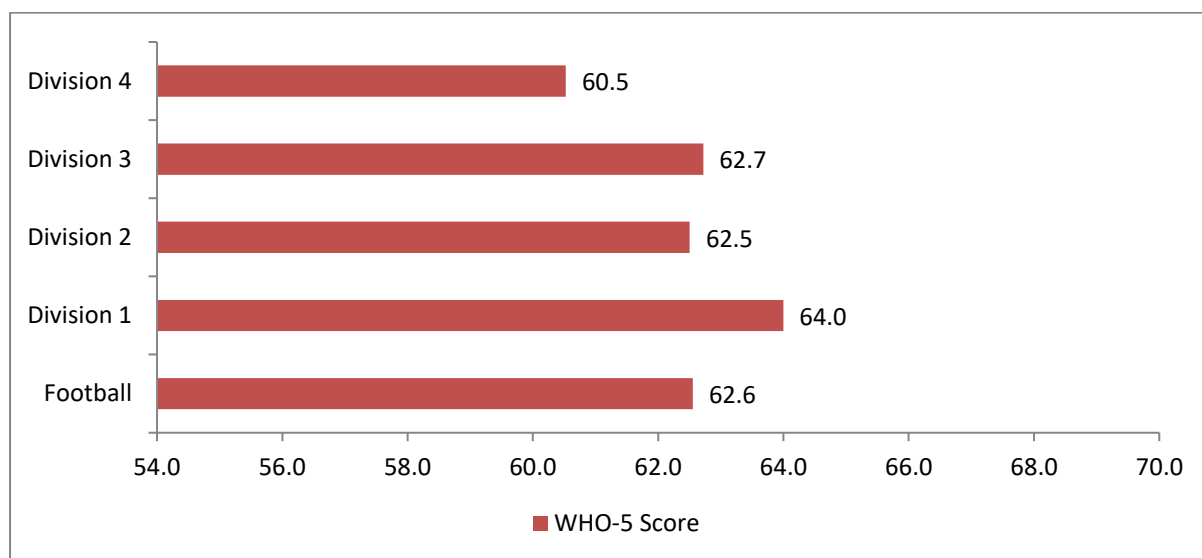
**FIGURE D.3.2 FINAL DECISION MAKER ON PLAYING SENIOR INTER-COUNTY MATCH WHEN INJURED: 2016 PLAYERS – OVERALL AND CODE**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

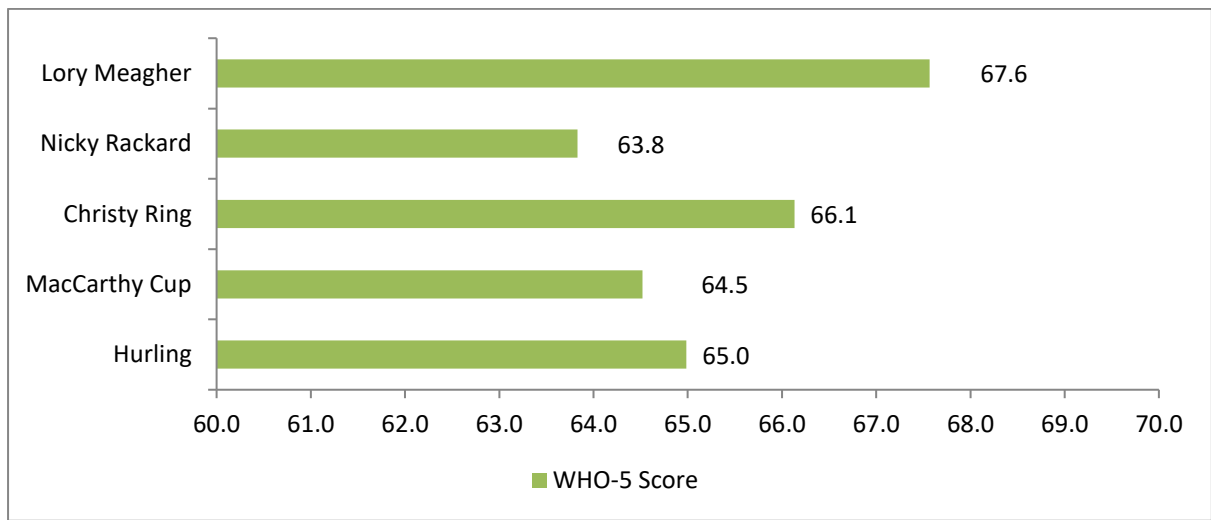
#### D.4 WELL-BEING AMONG 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS

**FIGURE D.4.1 WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION-5 WELL-BEING INDEX (WHO-5) FOR 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY FOOTBALLERS: OVERALL AND PLAYING LEVEL**



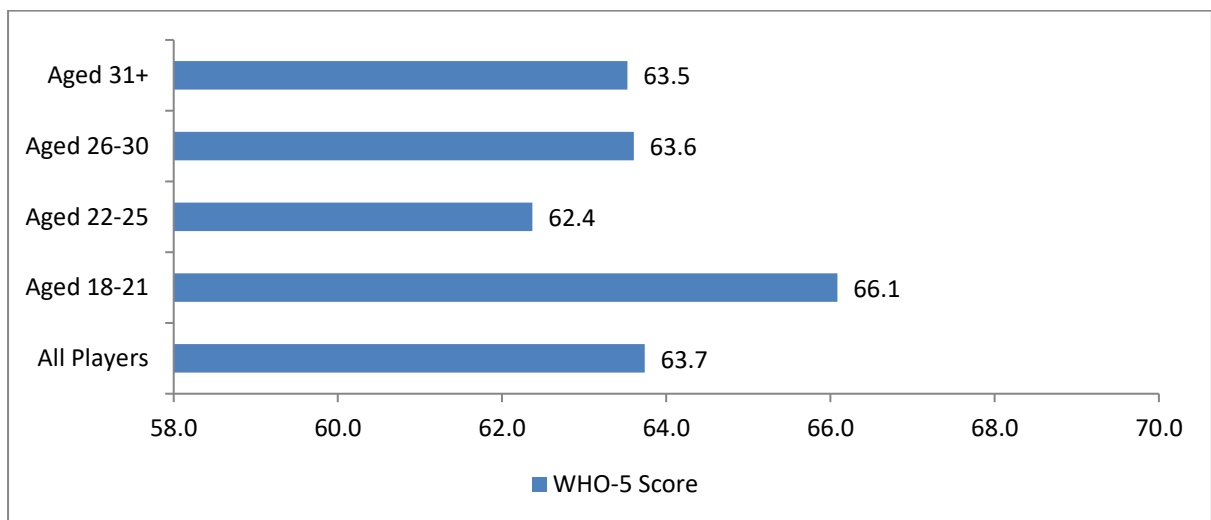
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE D.4.2 WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION-5 WELL-BEING INDEX (WHO-5) FOR 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY HURLERS: OVERALL AND PLAYING LEVEL**



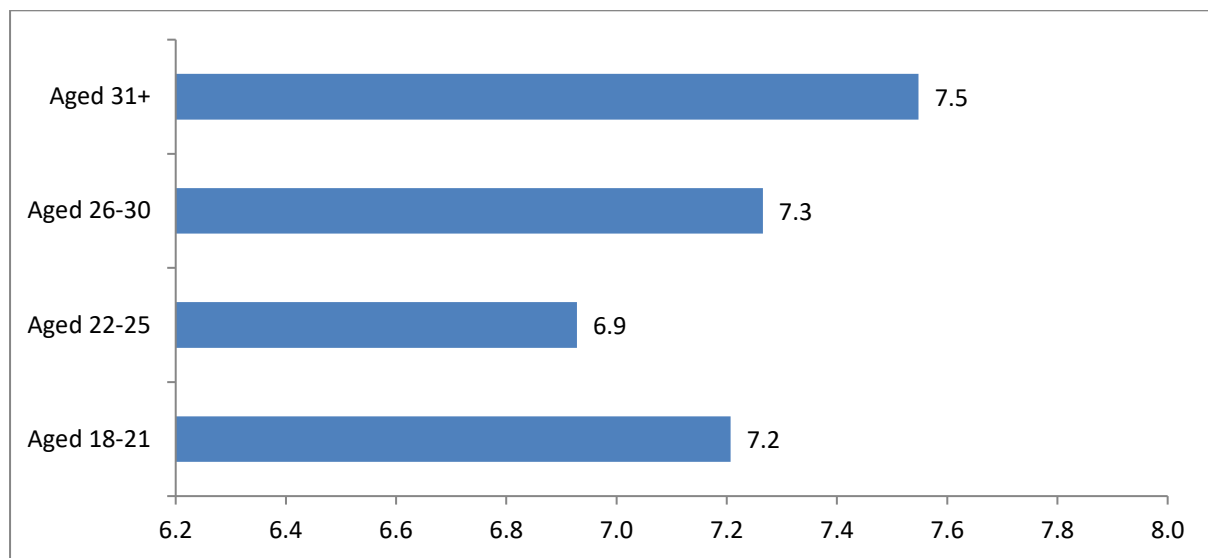
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE D.4.3 WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION-5 WELL-BEING INDEX (WHO-5) FOR 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS: OVERALL AND AGE GROUP**



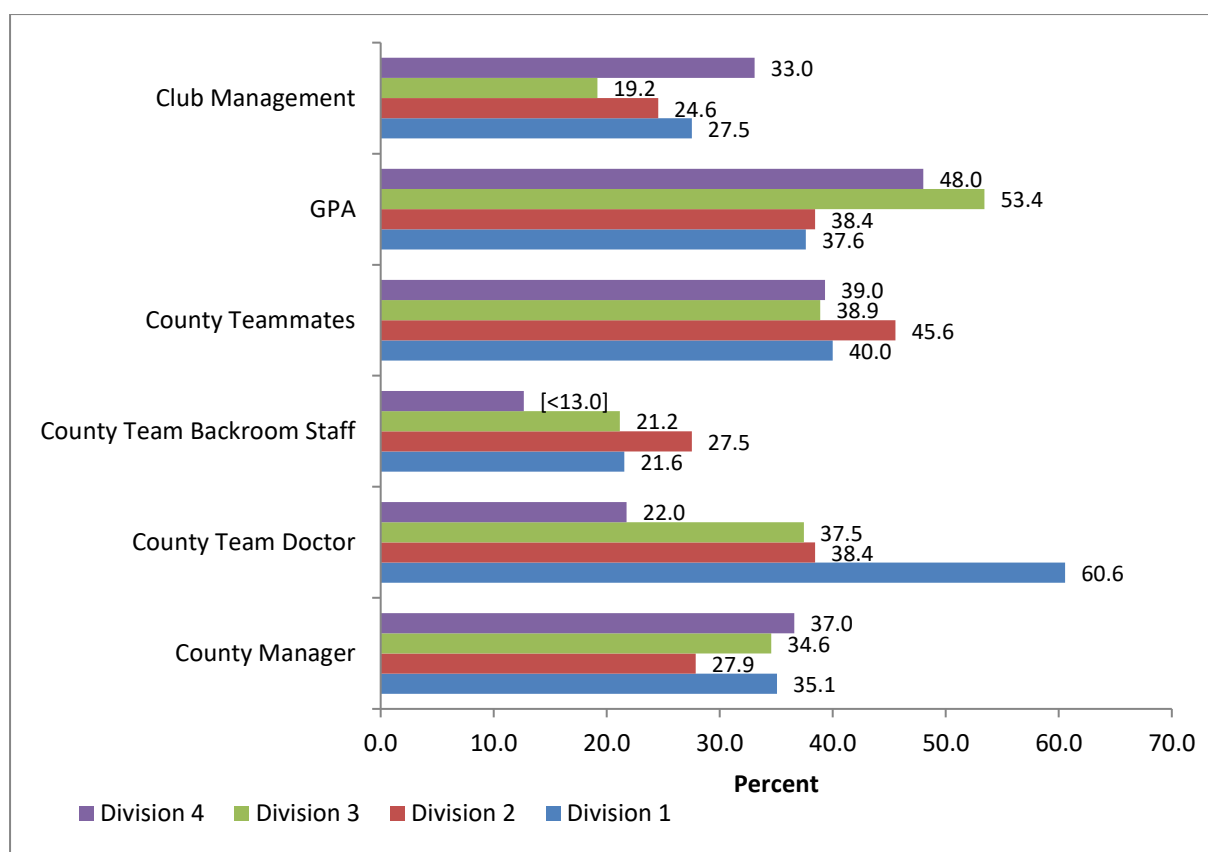
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE D.4.4 LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS: AGE GROUP (AVERAGE)**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

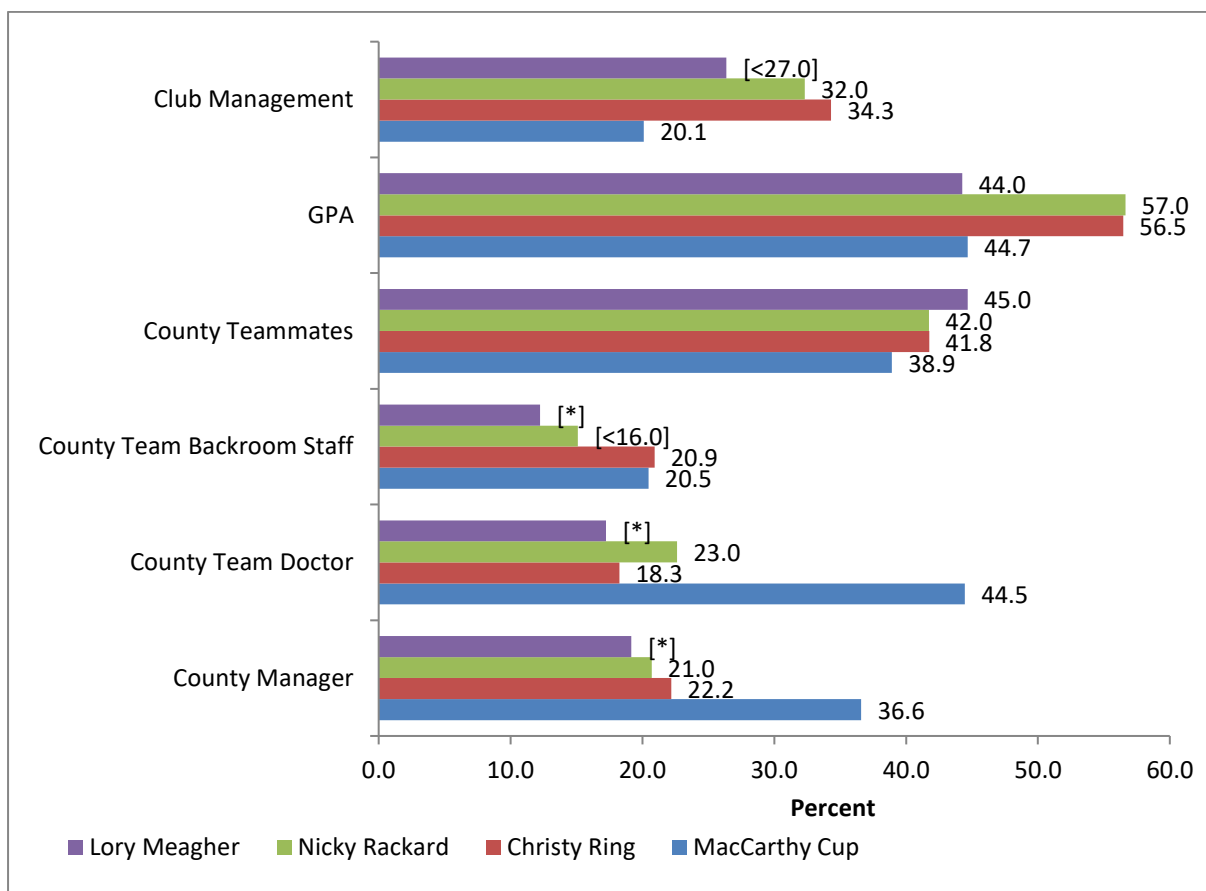
**FIGURE D.4.5 PERSON 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY GAELIC FOOTBALLERS WOULD FEEL COMFORTABLE APPROACHING IF HAD EMOTIONAL OR MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTY**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

**FIGURE D.4.6 PERSON 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY HURLERS WOULD FEEL COMFORTABLE APPROACHING IF HAD EMOTIONAL OR MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTY**

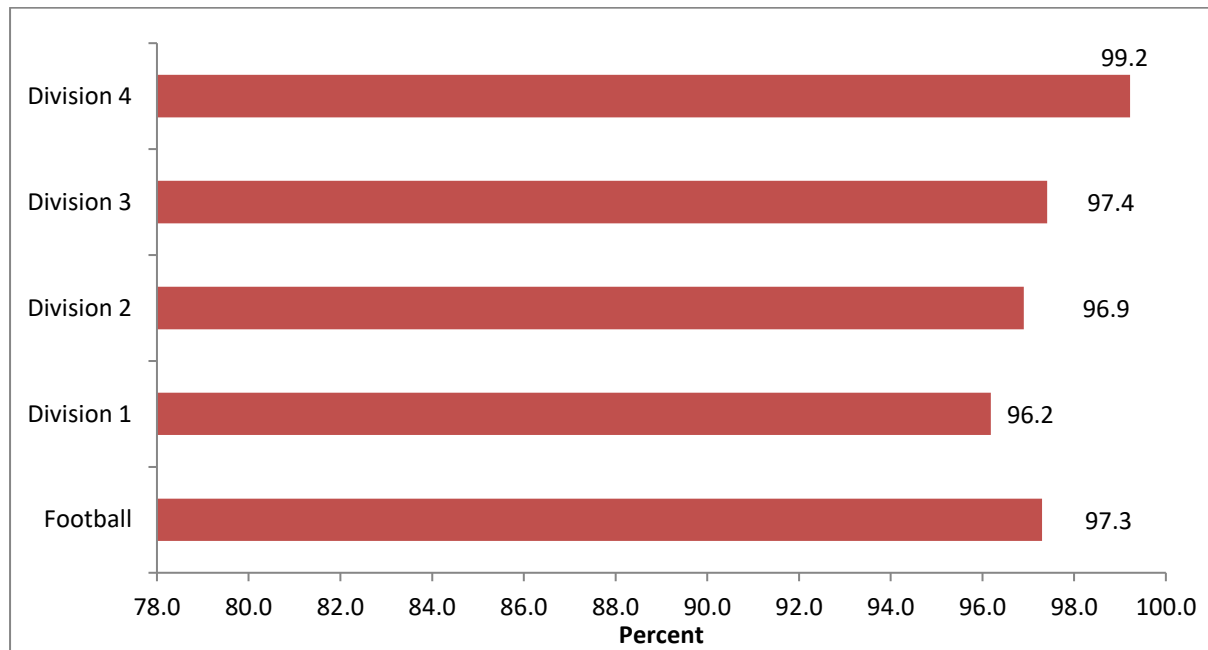


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.  
 [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

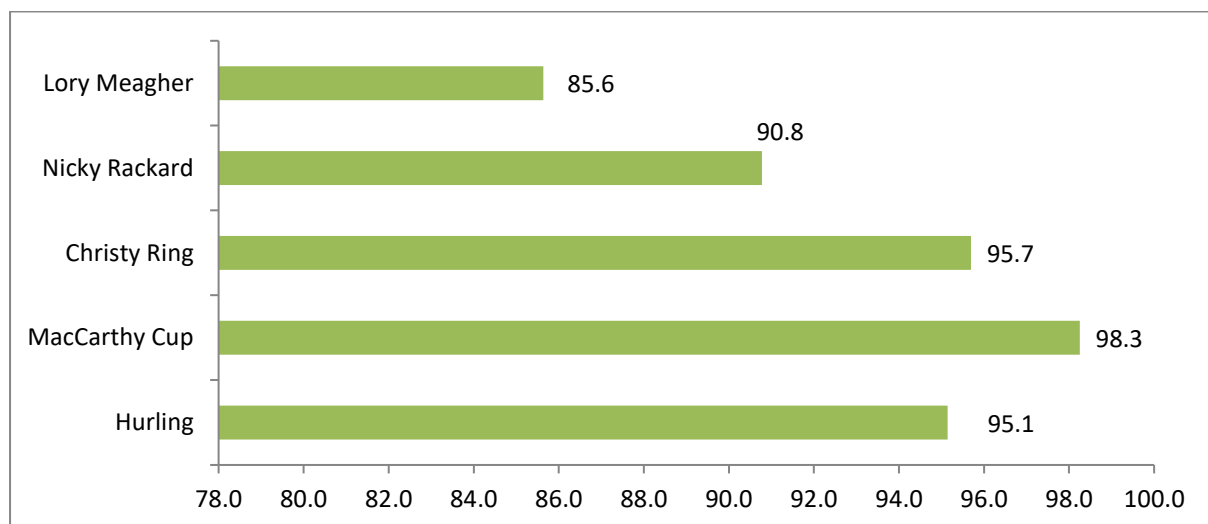
### D.5 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEWS ON THE EFFECTS OF INTER-COUNTY COMMITMENTS

**FIGURE D.5.1 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY TRAINING, PLAYING AND RELATED COMMITMENTS TAKE UP A LARGE AMOUNT OF 2016 PLAYERS' TIME: GAELIC FOOTBALLERS**

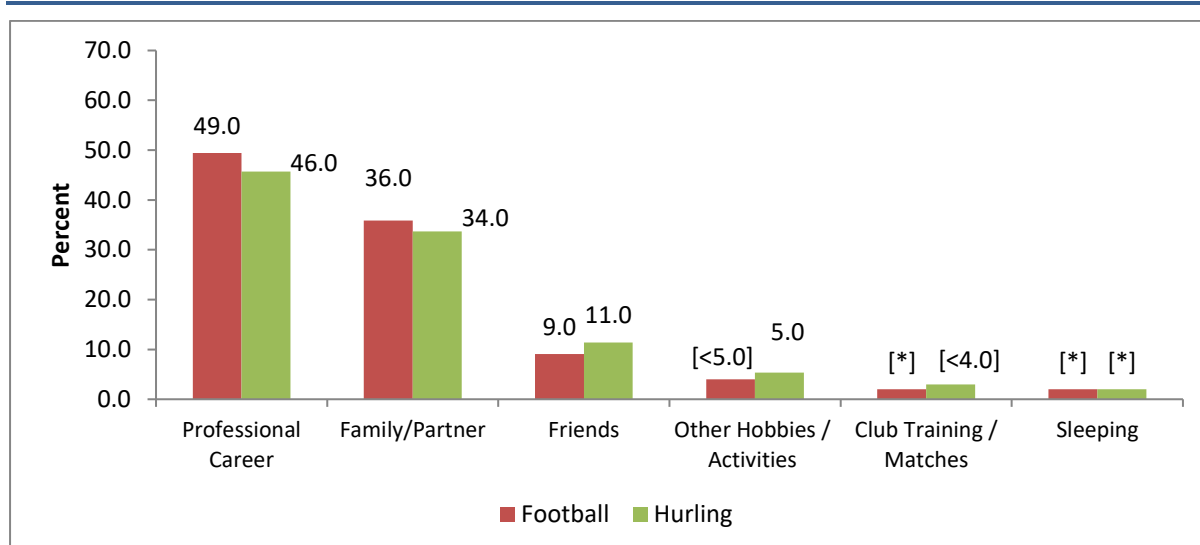


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE D.5.2 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY TRAINING, PLAYING AND RELATED COMMITMENTS TAKE UP A LARGE AMOUNT OF 2016 PLAYERS' TIME: HURLERS (PER CENT)**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE D.5.3 OTHER LIFE AREAS 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS WOULD LIKE TO SPEND MORE TIME ON: CODE**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.  
[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**TABLE D.5.1 MAIN DOWNSIDES OF PLAYING SENIOR INTER-COUNTY FOR 2016 GAELIC FOOTBALLERS (PER CENT)**

	Football	Division 1	Division 2	Division 3	Division 4
Less time with family/partner/friends	78.9	81.0	83.0	80.0	68.0
Time commitments too much	56.4	60.0	68.0	50.0	44.0
Less time with club	42.6	47.0	41.0	44.0	37.0
Professional career negatively affected	34.4	39.0	42.0	27.0	25.0
County no chance of winning	25.4	*	<9.0	39.0	66.0
Ongoing injury/injuries	21.4	18.0	22.0	20.0	26.0
Other	4.0	*	*	*	*
No downside	2.0	*	*	*	*

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.  
\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

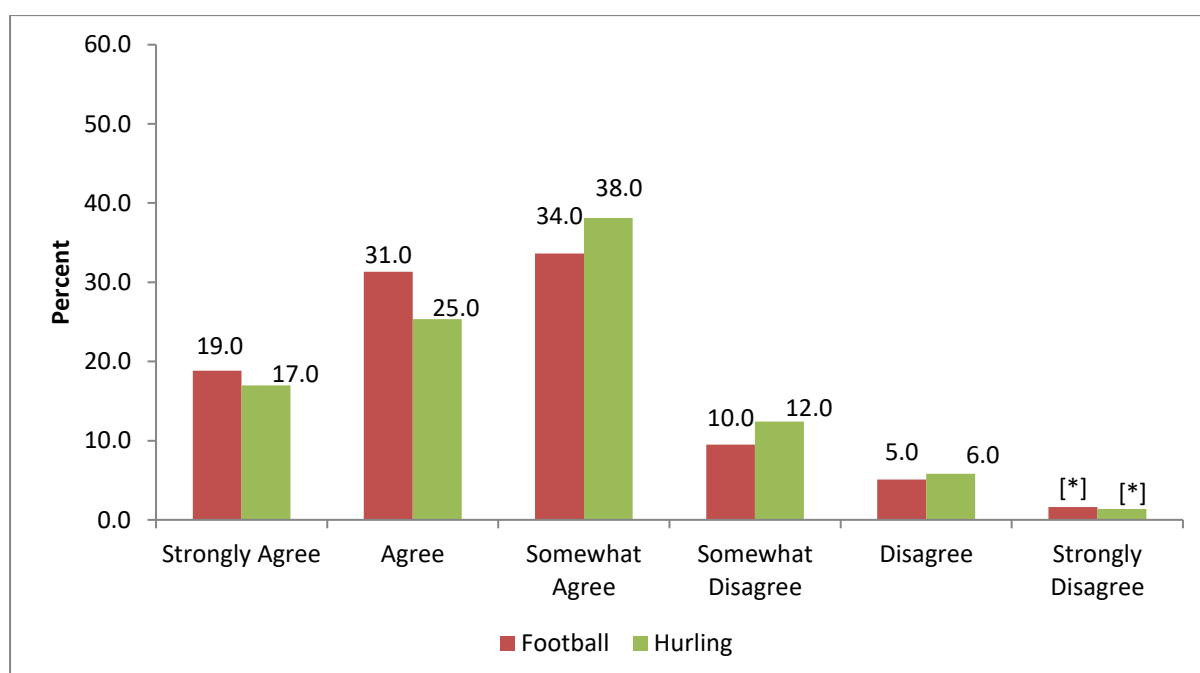
**TABLE D.5.2 MAIN DOWNSIDES OF PLAYING SENIOR INTER-COUNTY FOR 2016 HURLERS (PER CENT)**

	Hurling	MacCarthy Cup	Christy Ring	Nicky Rackard	Lory Meagher
Less time with family/partner/friends	74.3	75.0	70.0	73.0	85.0
Time commitments too much	48.2	52.0	46.0	44.0	41.0
Less time with club	44.4	46.0	51.0	41.0	[<31.0]
Professional career negatively affected	36.4	35.0	43.0	38.0	[<27.0]
County no chance of winning	21.8	17.0	25.0	25.0	33.0
Ongoing Injury/Injuries	22.0	22.0	19.0	26.0	[<23.0]
Other	3.5	[<5.0]	*	*	*
No downside	3.0	*	*	*	*

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE D.5.4 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEWS ON 'TOO MUCH EFFORT IS DEMANDED OF US AS PLAYERS': CODE**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**TABLE D.5.3 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS’ VIEWS ON ‘TOO MUCH EFFORT IS DEMANDED OF US AS PLAYERS’: PLAYING LEVEL (PER CENT)**

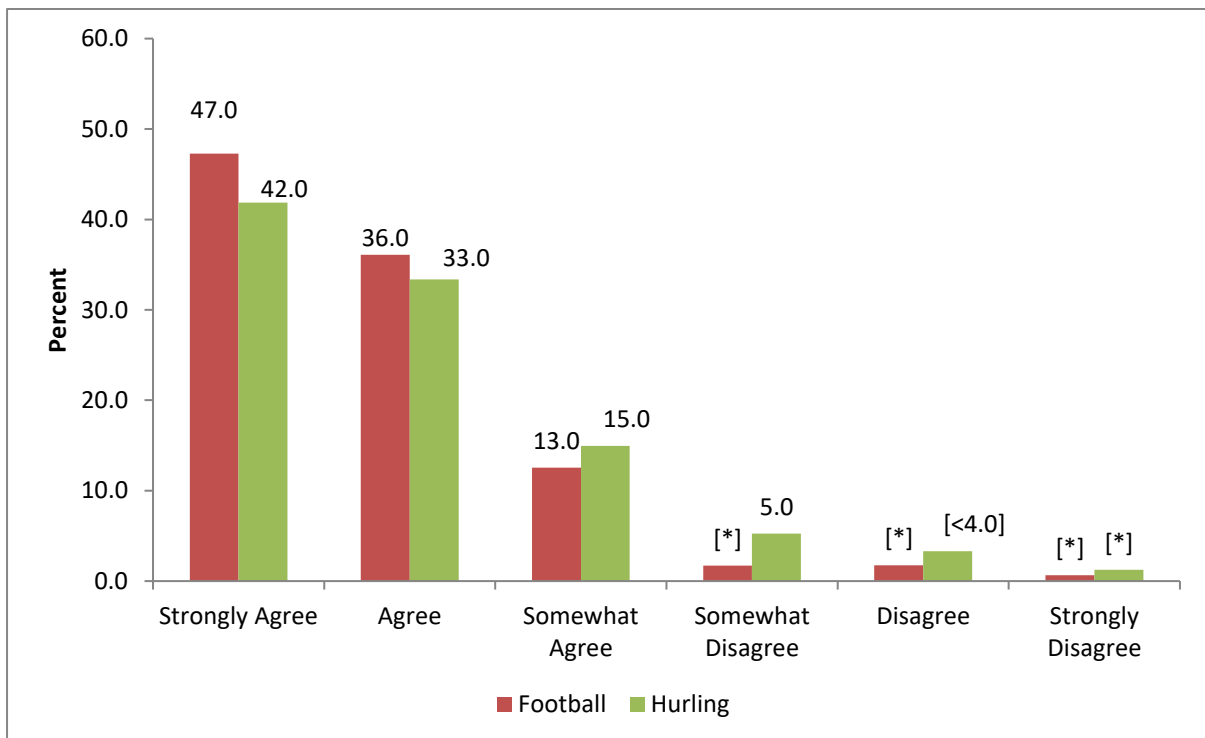
	Strongly Agree/Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Total
<b>Football</b>	<b>50.2</b>	<b>33.6</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>100</b>
Division 1	43.0	37.0	9.0	[<12.0]	100
Division 2	55.0	36.0	5.0	*	100
Division 3	45.0	32.0	16.0	*	100
Division 4	58.0	28.0	9.0	*	100
<b>Hurling</b>	<b>42.3</b>	<b>38.1</b>	<b>12.4</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>100</b>
MacCarthy Cup	45.2	34.6	11.4	8.8	100
Christy Ring	37.0	46.0	14.0	*	100
Nicky Rackard	40.0	40.0	15.0	*	100
Lory Meagher	44.0	36.0	7.0	*	100

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE D.5.5 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS’ VIEWS ON ‘WORKING CONDITIONS OF PAID JOB NEED TO BE FLEXIBLE TO ENABLE ME TO PLAY INTER-COUNTY’: CODE**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.



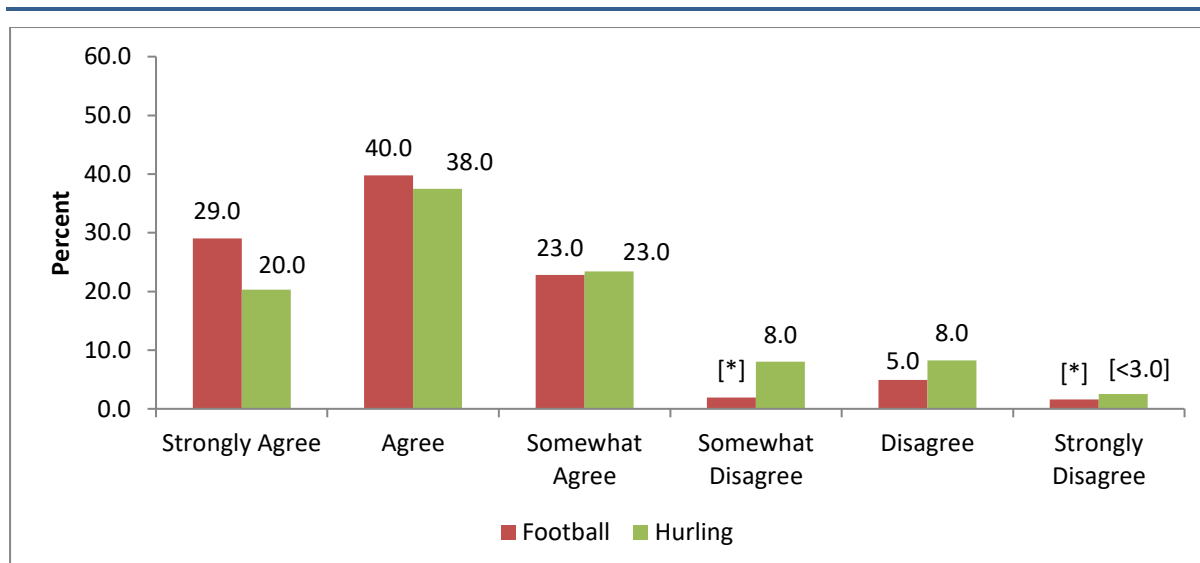
**TABLE D.5.4 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEWS ON 'WORKING CONDITIONS OF PAID JOB NEED TO BE FLEXIBLE TO ENABLE ME TO PLAY INTER-COUNTY': PLAYING LEVEL (PER CENT)**

	Strongly Agree/Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Total
<b>Football</b>	<b>83.4</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>100</b>
Division 1	88.0	[<9.0]	*	*	100
Division 2	84.0	14.0	*	*	100
Division 3	80.0	[<15.0]	*	*	100
Division 4	81.0	[<15.0]	*	*	100
<b>Hurling</b>	<b>75.2</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>100</b>
MacCarthy Cup	81.0	12.0	*	*	100
Christy Ring	65.0	22.0	*	*	100
Nicky Rackard	70.0	[<17.0]	*	*	100
Lory Meagher	77.0	*	*	*	100

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE D.5.6 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEWS ON 'I HAVE TO WATCH MY BEHAVIOUR IN PUBLIC': CODE**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

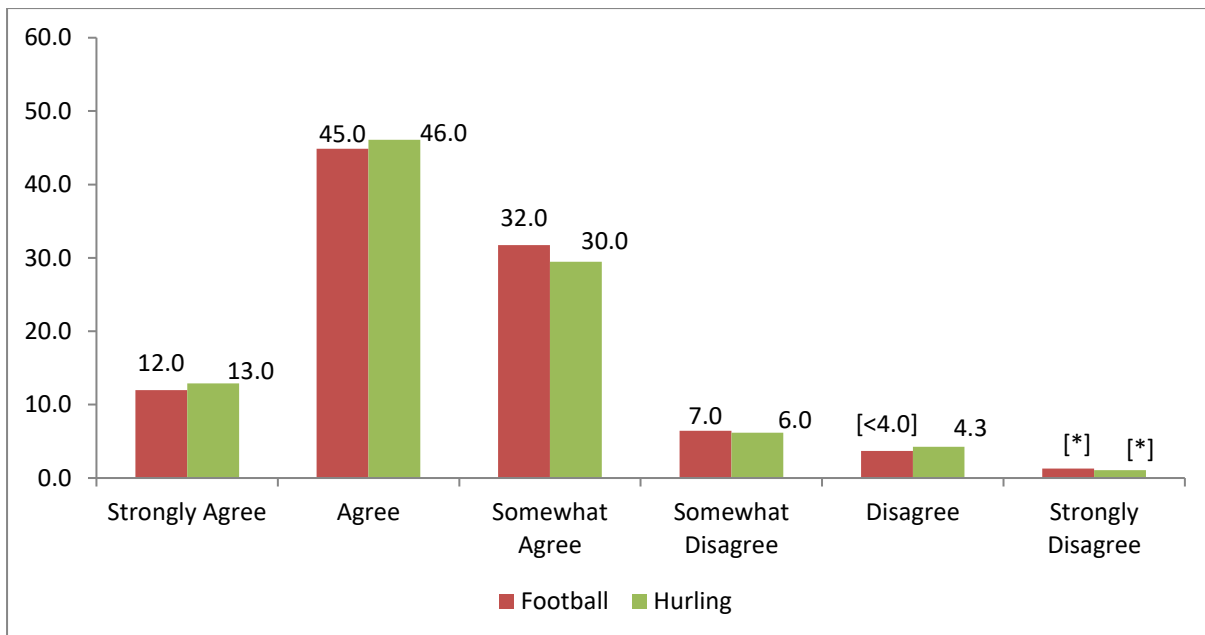
**TABLE D.5.5 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEWS ON 'I HAVE TO WATCH MY BEHAVIOUR IN PUBLIC': PLAYING LEVEL (PER CENT)**

	Strongly Agree/Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Total
<b>Football</b>	<b>68.8</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>100</b>
Division 1	78.0	19.0	*	*	100
Division 2	74.0	20.0	*	*	100
Division 3	63.0	24.0	*	[<10.0]	100
Division 4	57.0	31.0	*	[<11.0]	100
<b>Hurling</b>	<b>57.8</b>	<b>23.4</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>10.8</b>	<b>100</b>
MacCarthy Cup	74.0	17.0	[<4.0]	[<5.0]	100
Christy Ring	46.0	31.0	*	[<14.0]	100
Nicky Rackard	41.0	31.0	[<13.0]	[<16.0]	100
Lory Meagher	30.0	[<23.0]	*	[<29.0]	100

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE D.5.7 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEWS ON 'I ENJOY TAKING PART IN VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES THAT PROMOTE GAELIC GAMES': CODE (PER CENT)**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

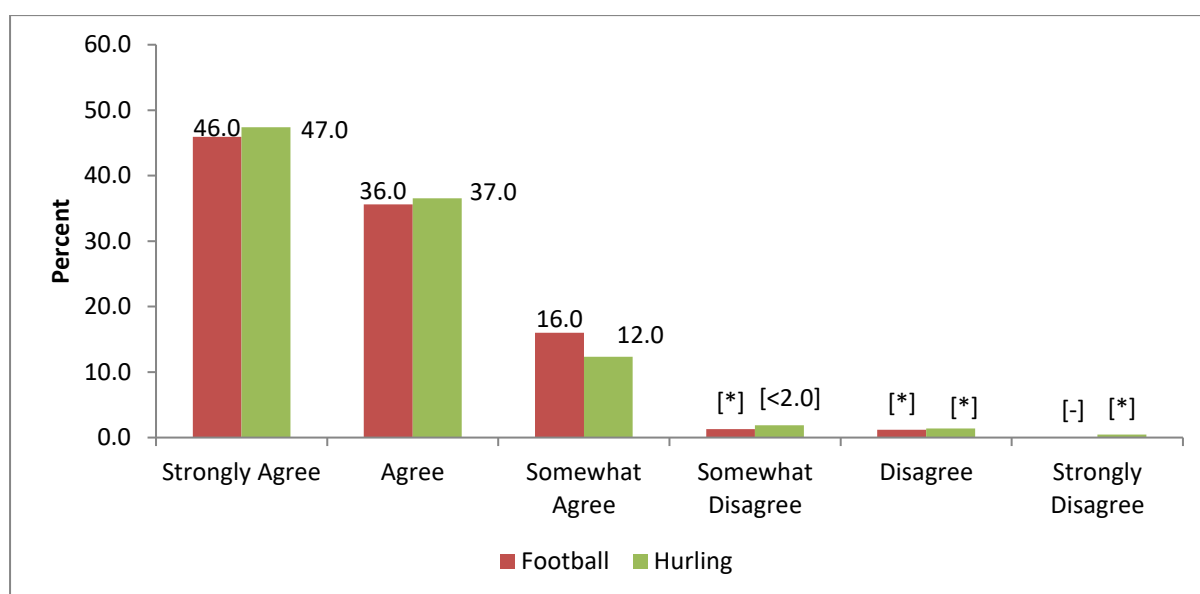
**TABLE D.5.6 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEWS ON 'I ENJOY TAKING PART IN VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES THAT PROMOTE GAELIC GAMES': PLAYING LEVEL (PER CENT)**

	Strongly Agree/Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Total
<b>Football</b>	<b>56.8</b>	<b>31.8</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>100</b>
Division 1	61.0	28.0	*	*	100
Division 2	54.0	36.0	*	*	100
Division 3	59.0	33.0	*	*	100
Division 4	54.0	30.0	[<11.0]	*	100
<b>Hurling</b>	<b>59.0</b>	<b>29.5</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>100</b>
MacCarthy Cup	52.9	30.5	9.3	7.3	100
Christy Ring	66.0	30.0	*	*	100
Nicky Rackard	67.0	25.0	*	*	100
Lory Meagher	59.0	[<33.0]	*	*	100

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE D.5.8 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEWS ON 'I AM GLAD I MADE THE CHOICE TO PLAY INTER-COUNTY': CODE**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable. [-] No responses.

**TABLE D.5.7 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEWS ON 'I AM GLAD I MADE THE CHOICE TO PLAY INTER-COUNTY': PLAYING LEVEL (PER CENT)**

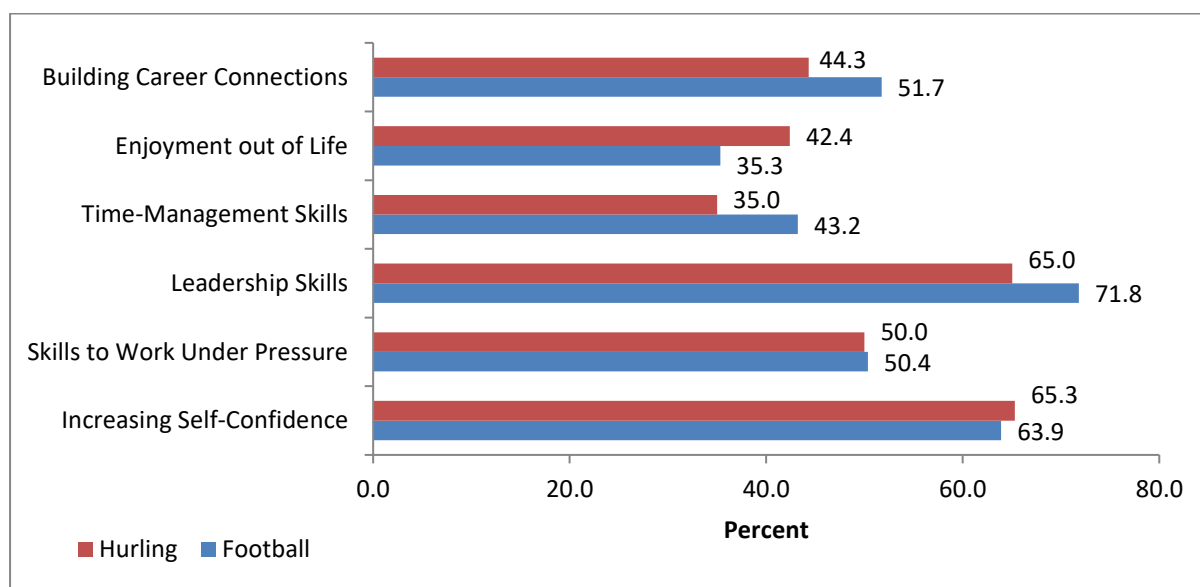
	Strongly Agree/Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree	Total
<b>Football</b>	<b>81.5</b>	<b>16.0</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>100</b>
Division 1	91.0	[<8.0]	*	100
Division 2	78.0	20.0	*	100
Division 3	80.0	[<17.0]	*	100
Division 4	76.0	22.5	*	100
<b>Hurling</b>	<b>83.9</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>100</b>
MacCarthy Cup	83.0	13.0	[<4.0]	100
Christy Ring	85.0	[<12.0]	*	100
Nicky Rackard	82.0	[<14.0]	*	100
Lory Meagher	94.0	*	*	100

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

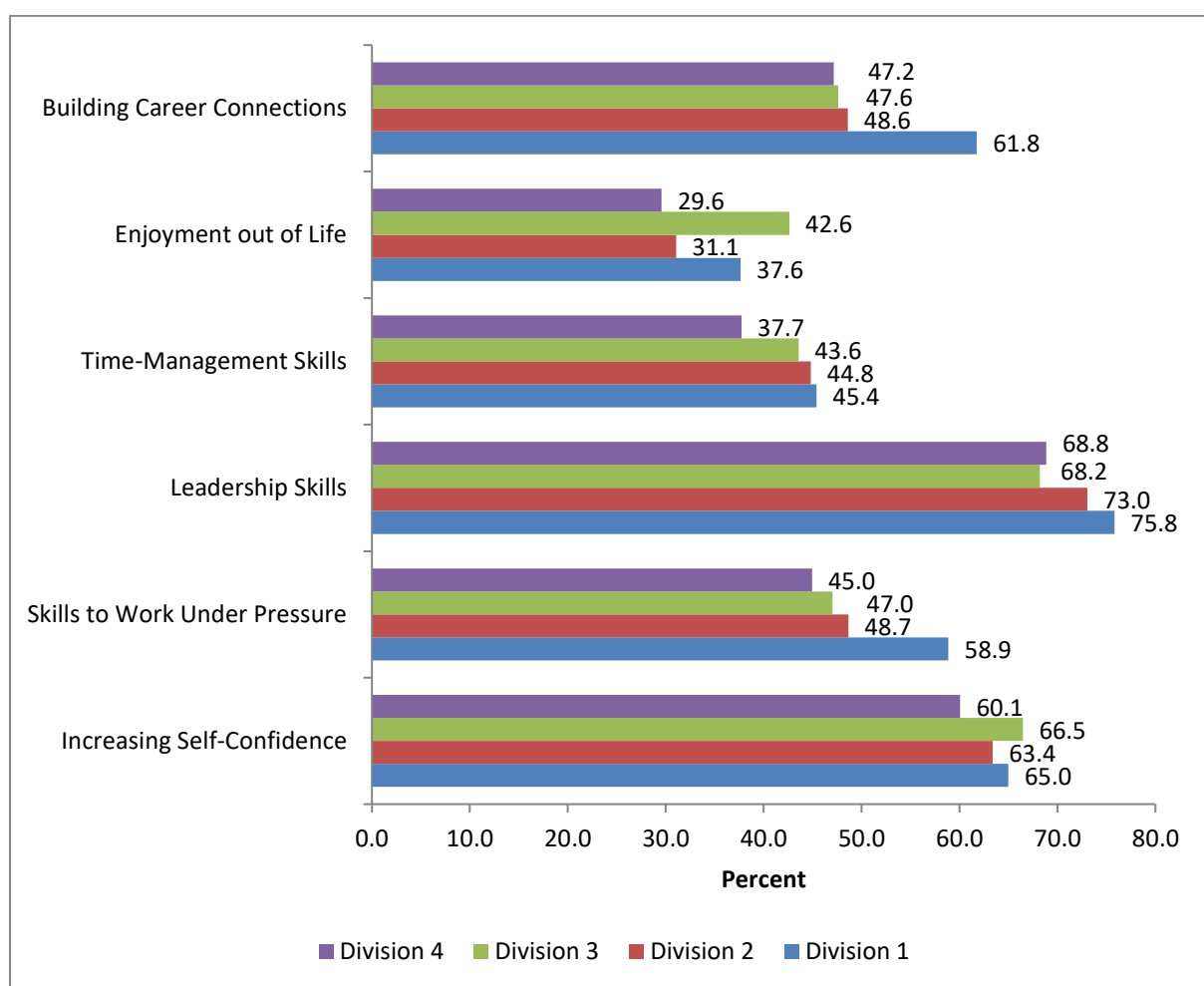
\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable

## D.6 BENEFITS OF BECOMING AN INTER-COUNTY PLAYER FROM A CLUB PLAYER ONLY FOR 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS

**FIGURE D.6.1 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEWS ON THE BENEFITS OF BECOMING AN INTER-COUNTY PLAYER FROM A CLUB PLAYER ONLY: CODE**

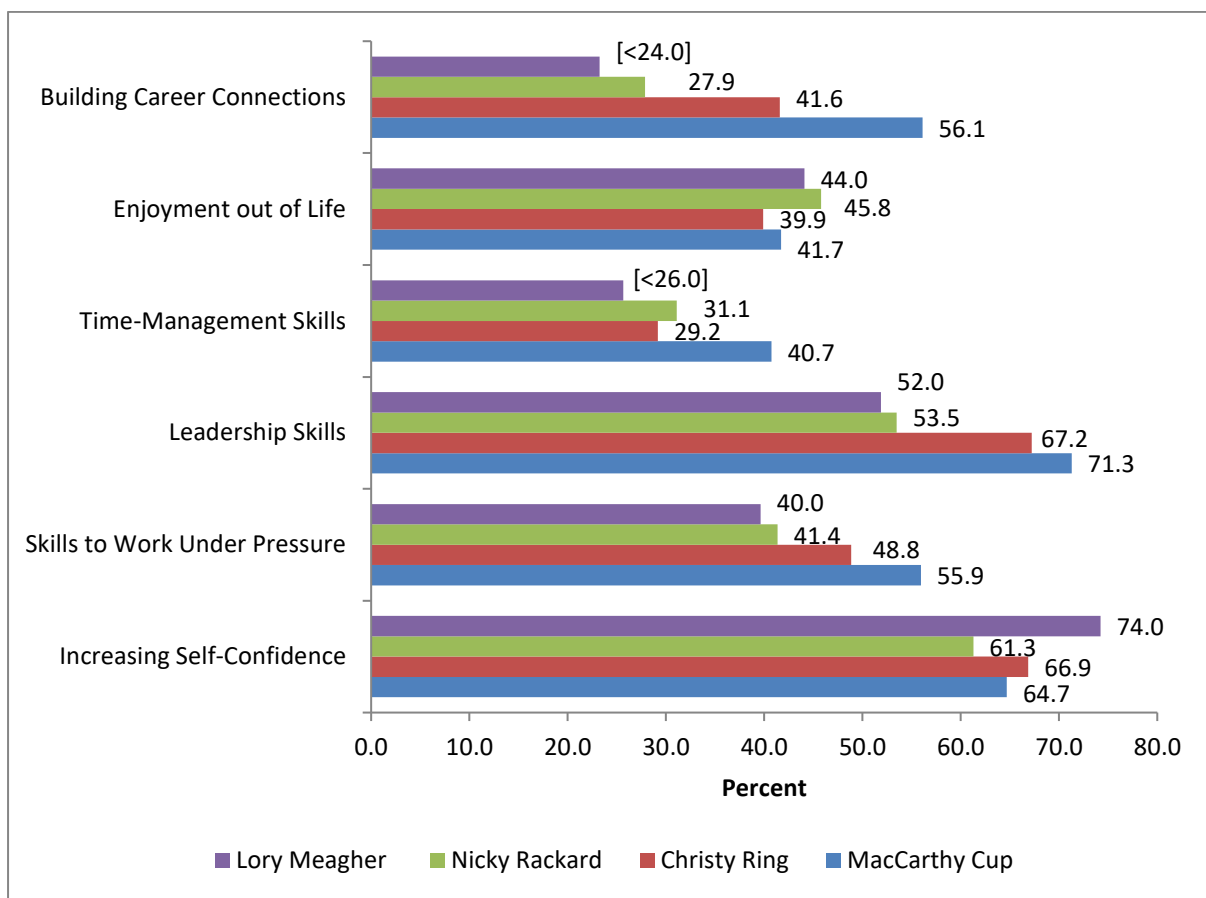
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE D.6.2 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY GAELIC FOOTBALLERS' VIEWS ON THE BENEFITS OF BECOMING AN INTER-COUNTY PLAYER FROM A CLUB PLAYER ONLY: PLAYING LEVEL**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

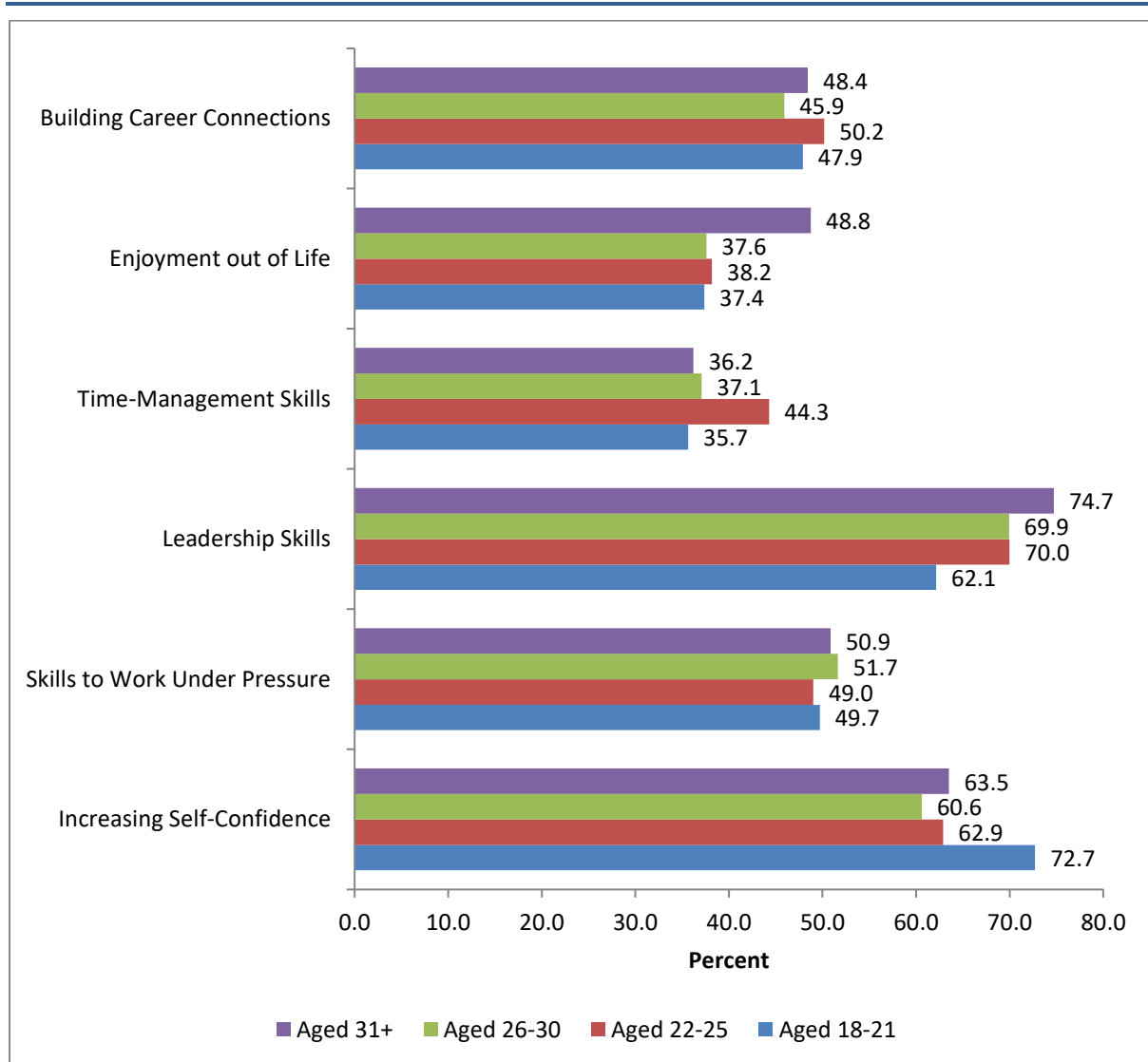
**FIGURE D.6.3 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY HURLERS’ VIEWS ON THE BENEFITS OF BECOMING AN INTER-COUNTY PLAYER FROM A CLUB PLAYER ONLY: PLAYING LEVEL**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

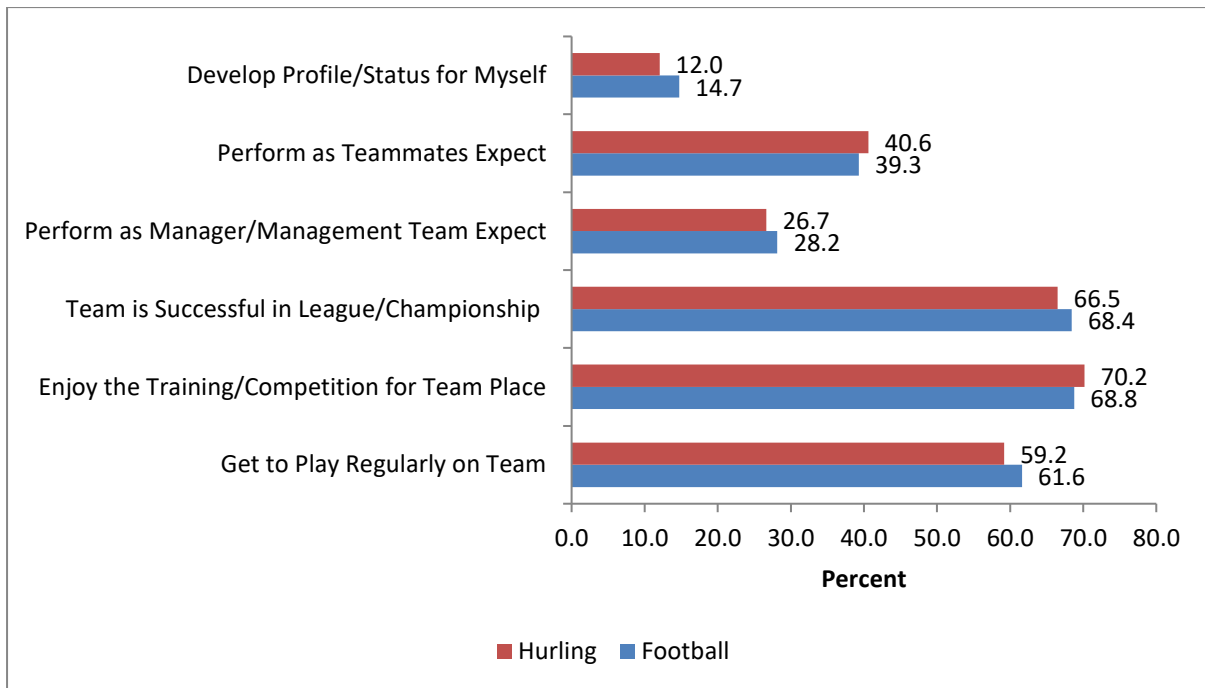
**FIGURE D.6.4 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEWS ON THE BENEFITS OF BECOMING AN INTER-COUNTY PLAYER FROM A CLUB PLAYER ONLY: AGE GROUP**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

### D.7 MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF INTER-COUNTY EXPERIENCE FOR 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS

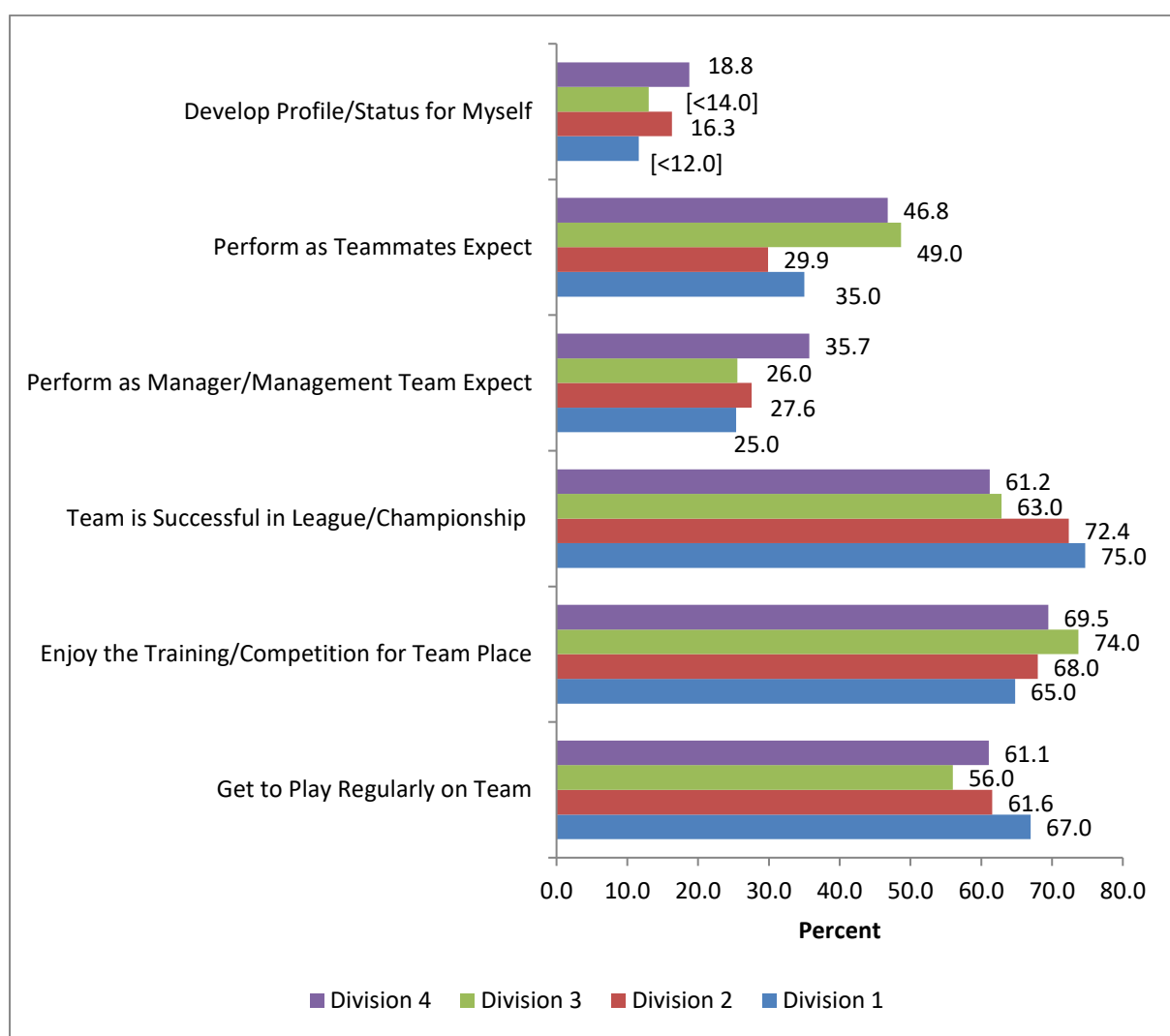
FIGURE D.7.1 MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF INTER-COUNTY EXPERIENCE FOR 2016 PLAYERS: CODE



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).



**FIGURE D.7.2 MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF INTER-COUNTY EXPERIENCE FOR 2016 GAELIC FOOTBALLERS: PLAYING LEVEL**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

**FIGURE D.7.3 MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF INTER-COUNTY EXPERIENCE FOR 2016 HURLERS: PLAYING LEVEL**

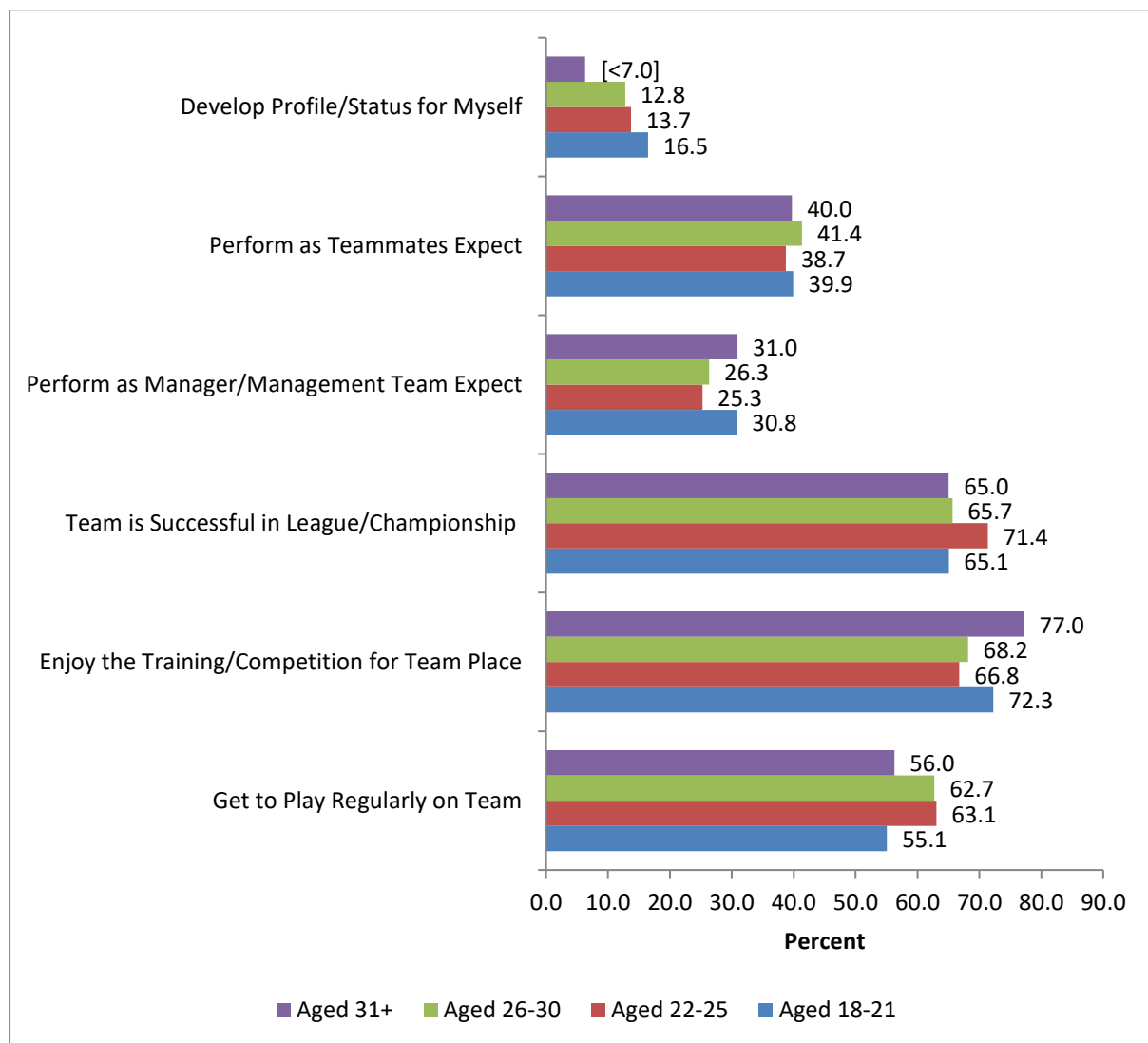


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable

**FIGURE D.7.4 MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF INTER-COUNTY EXPERIENCE FOR 2016 PLAYERS: AGE GROUP**

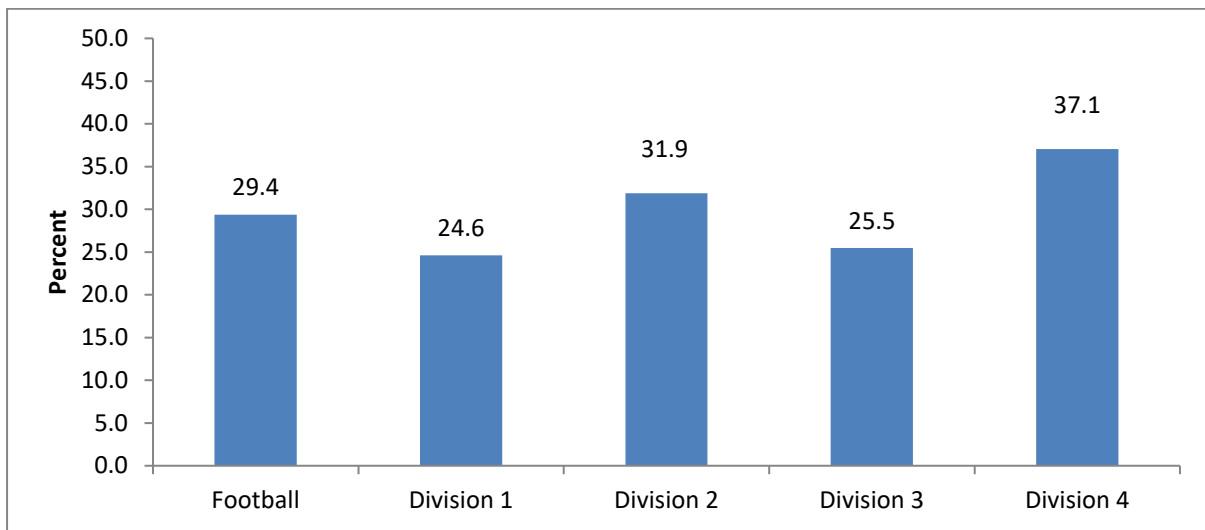


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

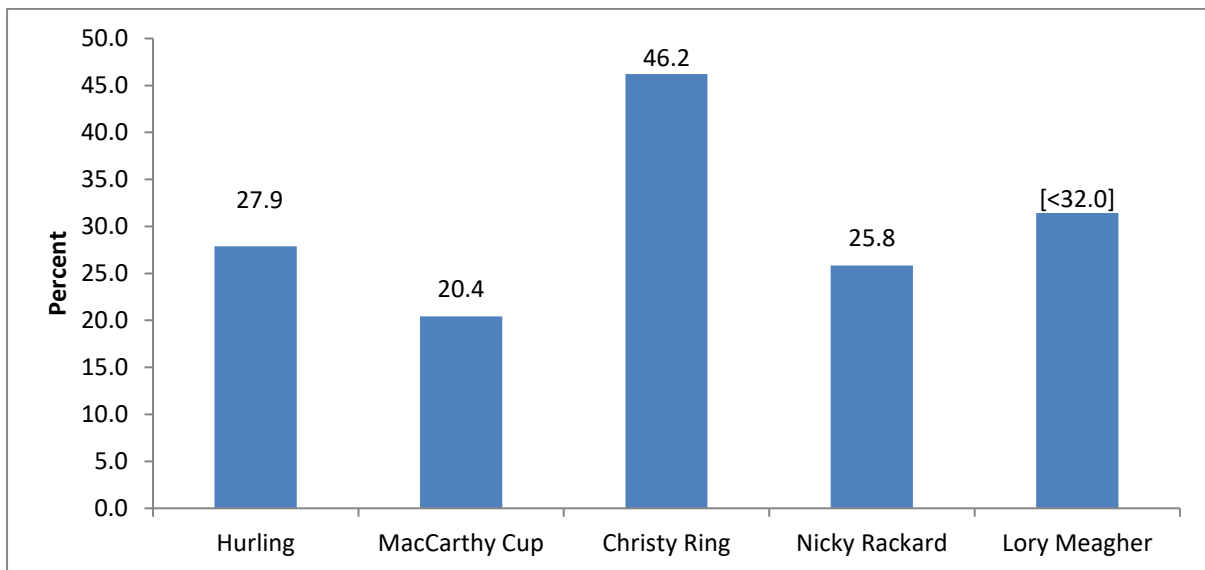
## D.8 DROP-OUT FROM SENIOR INTER-COUNTY

**FIGURE D.8.1 2016 GAELIC FOOTBALLERS NO LONGER PLAYING SENIOR INTER-COUNTY IN 2017: PLAYING LEVEL**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

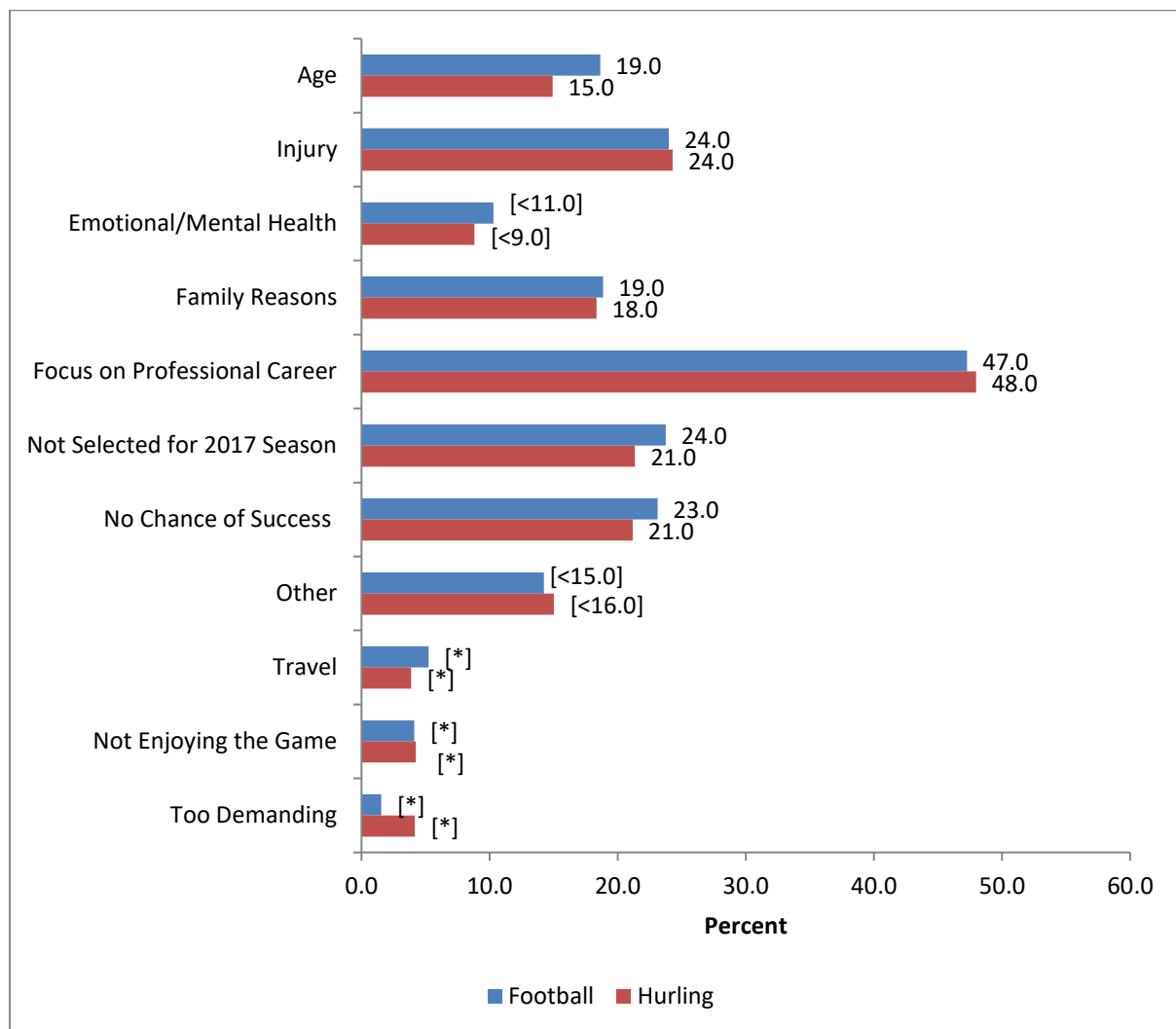
**FIGURE D.8.2 2016 HURLERS NO LONGER PLAYING SENIOR INTER-COUNTY IN 2017: PLAYING LEVEL**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([<32.0]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

**FIGURE D.8.3 MAIN REASONS WHY 2016 PLAYERS DID NOT PLAY SENIOR INTER-COUNTY IN 2017: CODE**



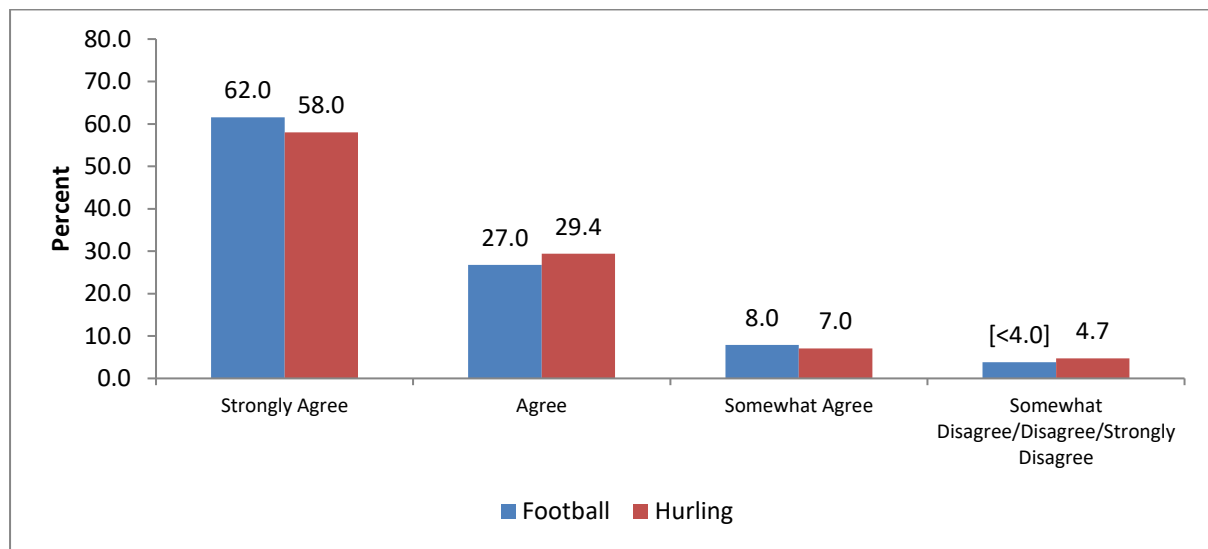
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.  
 [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

## APPENDIX E: CHAPTER 7 SUPPLEMENTARY WORK

### E.1 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' EXPERIENCE OF PLAYING BOTH INTER-COUNTY AND CLUB

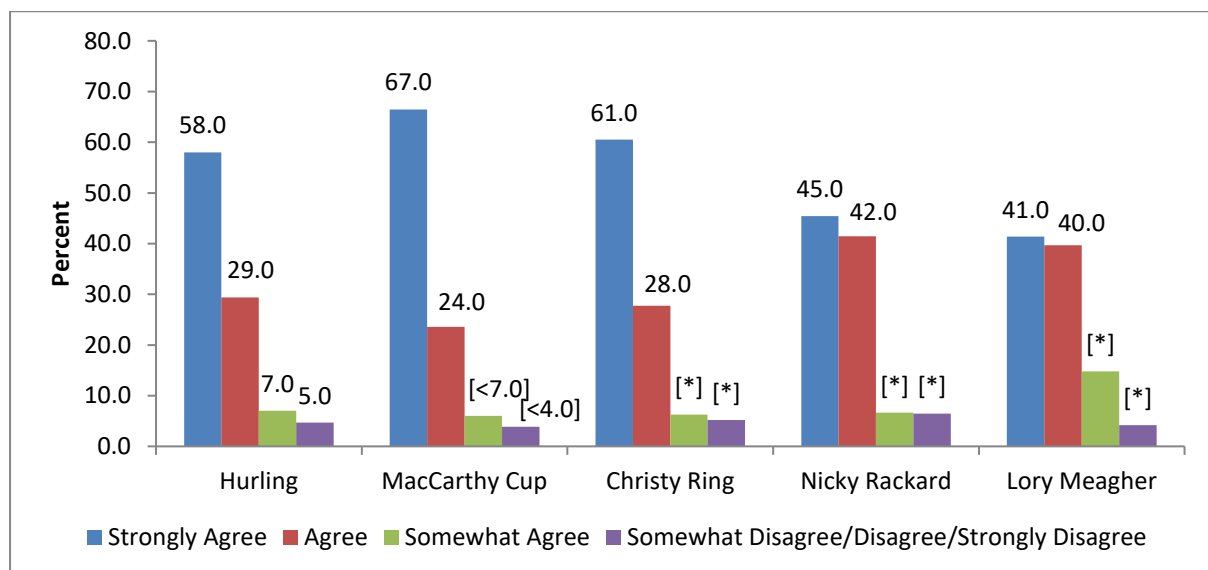
FIGURE E.1.1 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEW ON 'PLAYING FOR MY CLUB TEAM HAS PLAYED A BIG ROLE IN MY DEVELOPMENT AS A GAELIC PLAYER': CODE



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

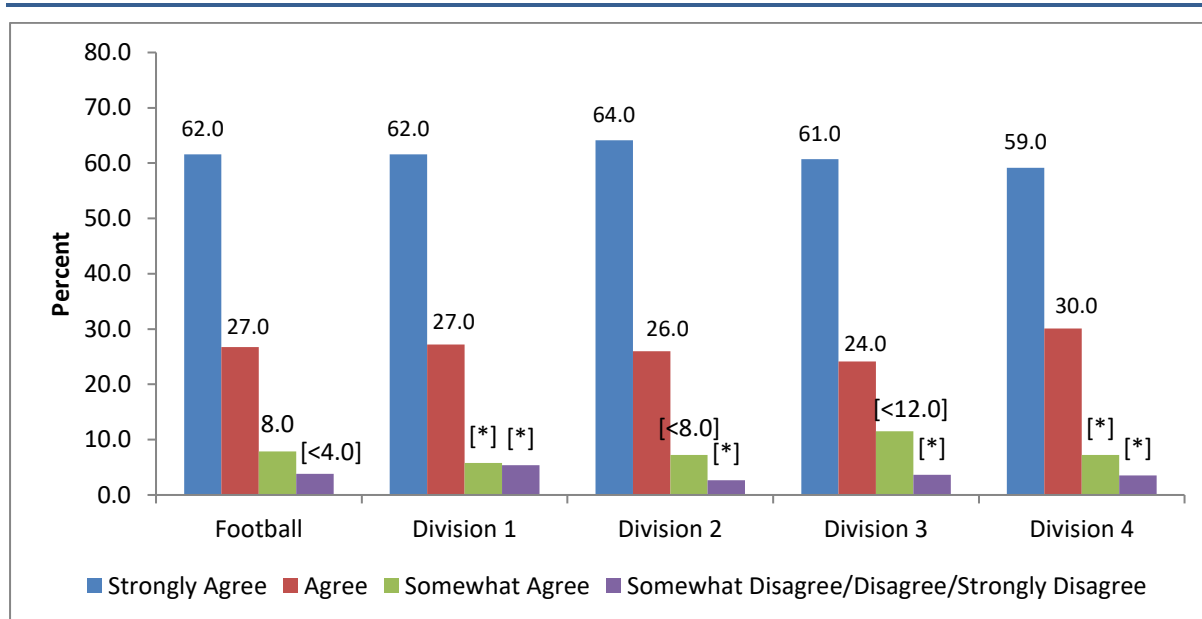
FIGURE E.1.2 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY HURLERS' VIEW ON 'PLAYING FOR MY CLUB TEAM HAS PLAYED A BIG ROLE IN MY DEVELOPMENT AS A GAELIC PLAYER': PLAYING LEVEL



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE E.1.3 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY FOOTBALLERS' VIEW ON 'PLAYING FOR MY CLUB TEAM HAS PLAYED A BIG ROLE IN MY DEVELOPMENT AS A GAELIC PLAYER': PLAYING LEVEL**

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**TABLE E.1.1 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEW ON 'MY CLUB MANAGER AND MANAGEMENT TEAM EXPECT TOO MUCH FROM ME WHEN I RETURN FROM INTER-COUNTY DUTIES TO PLAY WITH MY CLUB': CODE AND PLAYING LEVEL (PER CENT)**

	Strongly Agree/Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Total
<b>Football</b>	<b>32.8</b>	<b>28.7</b>	<b>17.6</b>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>100</b>
Division 1	29.7	31.9	18.7	19.7	100
Division 2	27.0	28.1	19.2	25.7	100
Division 3	37.0	26.0	<15.0	22.0	100
Division 4	40.0	28.0	18.0	<16.0	100
<b>Hurling</b>	<b>29.5</b>	<b>32.6</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>100</b>
MacCarthy Cup	28.0	30.0	17.0	25.0	100
Christy Ring	33.0	42.0	<13.0	<13.0	100
Nicky Rackard	29.0	35.0	<20.0	<18.0	100
Lory Meagher	<32.0	*	<22.0	<28.0	100

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**TABLE E.1.2 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEW ON 'MY CLUB TEAMMATES ARE RESENTFUL TOWARDS ME WHEN I RETURN TO PLAY FOR THE CLUB AFTER INTER-COUNTY DUTIES': CODE AND PLAYING LEVEL (PER CENT)**

	Strongly Agree/Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Total
<b>Football</b>	<b>15.5</b>	<b>20.8</b>	<b>20.2</b>	<b>43.5</b>	<b>100</b>
Division 1	15.9	15.8	25.0	43.3	100
Division 2	[<14.0]	21.0	22.0	45.0	100
Division 3	[<15.0]	25.0	18.0	43.0	100
Division 4	19.0	24.0	15.0	43.0	100
<b>Hurling</b>	<b>16.0</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>46.0</b>	<b>100</b>
MacCarthy Cup	17.5	17.9	15.6	49.1	100
Christy Ring	21.0	20.0	[<19.0]	41.0	100
Nicky Rackard	*	23.0	21.0	48.0	100
Lory Meagher	*	*	34.0	37.0	100

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**TABLE E.1.3 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEW ON 'MY CLUB IS PROUD THAT I REPRESENT THE CLUB ON THE COUNTY TEAM': CODE AND PLAYING LEVEL (PER CENT)**

	Strongly Agree/Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Total
<b>Football</b>	<b>71.0</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>[&lt;3.0]</b>	<b>100</b>
Division 1	76.0	17.0	*	*	100
Division 2	74.0	18.0	*	*	100
Division 3	71.0	22.0	*	*	100
Division 4	58.0	29.0	[<11.0]	*	100
<b>Hurling</b>	<b>69.0</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>100</b>
MacCarthy Cup	77.0	16.0	[<4.0]	[<4.0]	100
Christy Ring	67.0	[<14.0]	[<12.0]	*	100
Nicky Rackard	57.0	28.0	*	*	100
Lory Meagher	56.0	[<32.0]	*	*	100

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.



**TABLE E.1.4 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEW ON 'MY INTER-COUNTY COMMITMENTS PREVENT ME FROM SOCIALISING WITH MY CLUB TEAMMATES': CODE AND PLAYING LEVEL (PER CENT)**

	Strongly Agree/Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Total
<b>Football</b>	<b>75.0</b>	<b>18.0</b>	<b>[&lt;4.0]</b>	<b>[&lt;3.0]</b>	<b>100</b>
Division 1	87.0	*	*	*	100
Division 2	75.0	21.0	*	*	100
Division 3	68.0	26.0	*	*	100
Division 4	71.0	21.0	*	*	100
<b>Hurling</b>	<b>65.0</b>	<b>23.0</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>100</b>
MacCarthy Cup	77.0	19.0	*	*	100
Christy Ring	57.0	31.0	*	*	100
Nicky Rackard	52.0	26.0	*	[<14.0]	100
Lory Meagher	49.0	[<23.0]	*	*	100

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**TABLE E.1.5 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEW ON 'MY CLUB MANAGEMENT TEAM IS UNDERSTANDING WHEN MY INTER-COUNTY COMMITMENTS RESTRICT ME FROM PARTICIPATING IN CLUB TRAINING/MATCHES': CODE AND PLAYING LEVEL (PER CENT)**

	Strongly Agree/Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Total
<b>Football</b>	<b>67.0</b>	<b>18.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>100</b>
Division 1	76.0	[<13.0]	*	*	100
Division 2	69.0	20.0	*	*	100
Division 3	67.0	18.0	[<9.0]	*	100
Division 4	54.0	20.0	[<18.0]	*	100
<b>Hurling</b>	<b>58.0</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>100</b>
MacCarthy Cup	68.0	21.0	[<7.0]	[<5.0]	100
Christy Ring	53.0	32.0	*	*	100
Nicky Rackard	44.0	31.0	[<14.0]	[<12.0]	100
Lory Meagher	47.0	[<29.0]	*	*	100

Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**TABLE E.1.6 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEW ON 'THERE IS A RESPECTFUL UNDERSTANDING, AND GOOD COMMUNICATION, BETWEEN MY CLUB AND COUNTY MANAGEMENT TEAMS REGARDING MY AVAILABILITY TO PARTICIPATE FOR BOTH TEAMS': CODE AND PLAYING LEVEL (PER CENT)**

	Strongly Agree/Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Total
<b>Football</b>	33.0	26.8	17.0	23.2	100
Division 1	42.0	23.0	[<11.0]	25.0	100
Division 2	33.1	28.3	17.2	21.3	100
Division 3	31.0	33.0	20.0	[<17.0]	100
Division 4	23.4	23.8	22.1	30.7	100
<b>Hurling</b>	36.1	25.7	17.7	20.5	100
MacCarthy Cup	44.2	20.2	18.0	17.7	100
Christy Ring	31.0	31.0	[<19.0]	20.0	100
Nicky Rackard	24.0	30.0	[<17.0]	30.0	100
Lory Meagher	[<31.0]	36.0	*	*	100

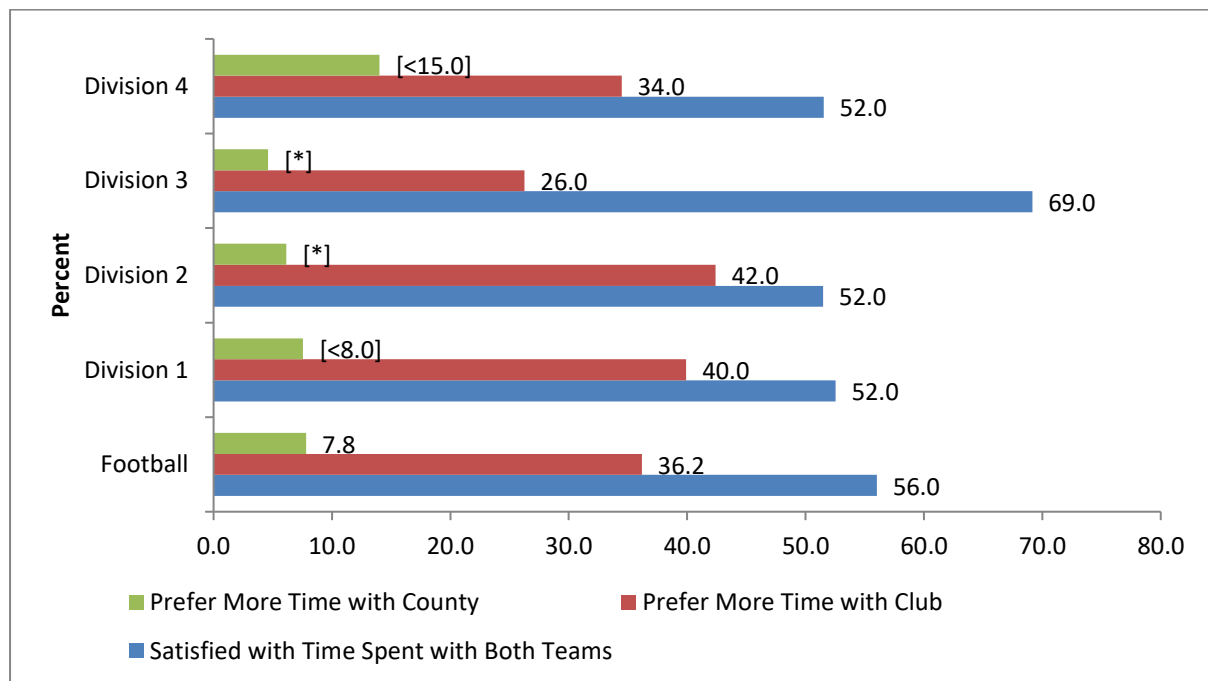
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

\* Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

## E.2 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY PLAYERS' VIEWS ON AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WITH CLUB TEAM COMPARED WITH INTER-COUNTY TEAM DURING THE 2016 SEASON

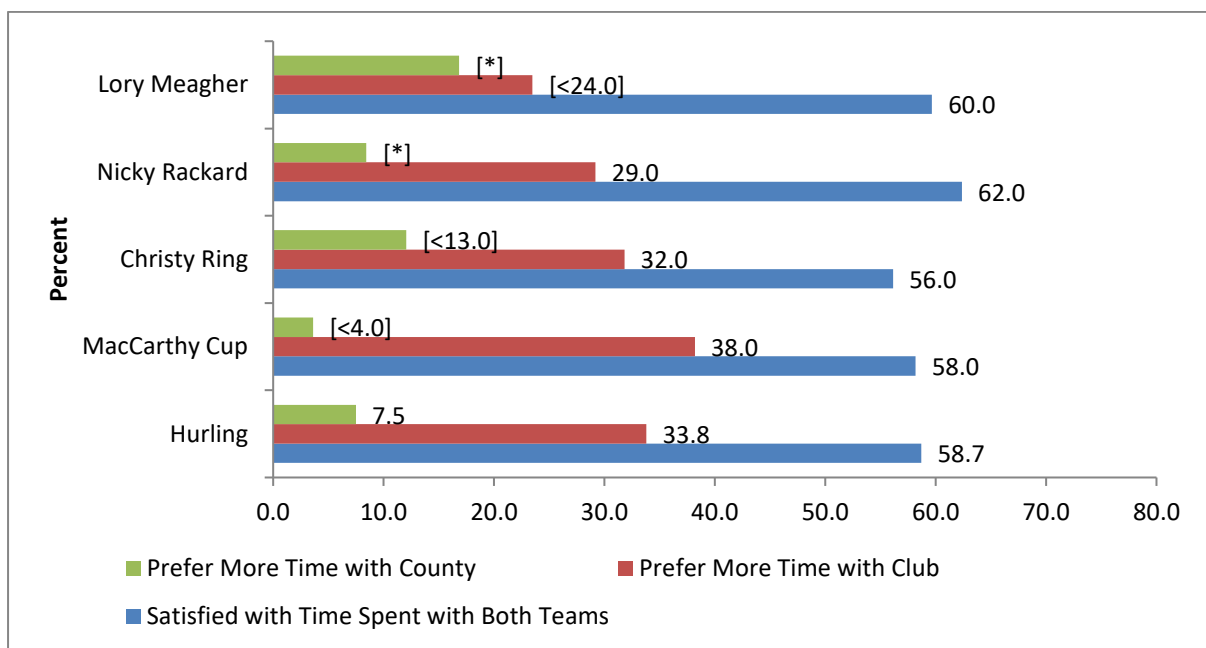
FIGURE E.2.1 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY FOOTBALLERS' VIEW ON AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WITH CLUB TEAM COMPARED WITH COUNTY TEAM DURING THE 2016 PRE-SEASON: PLAYING LEVEL



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

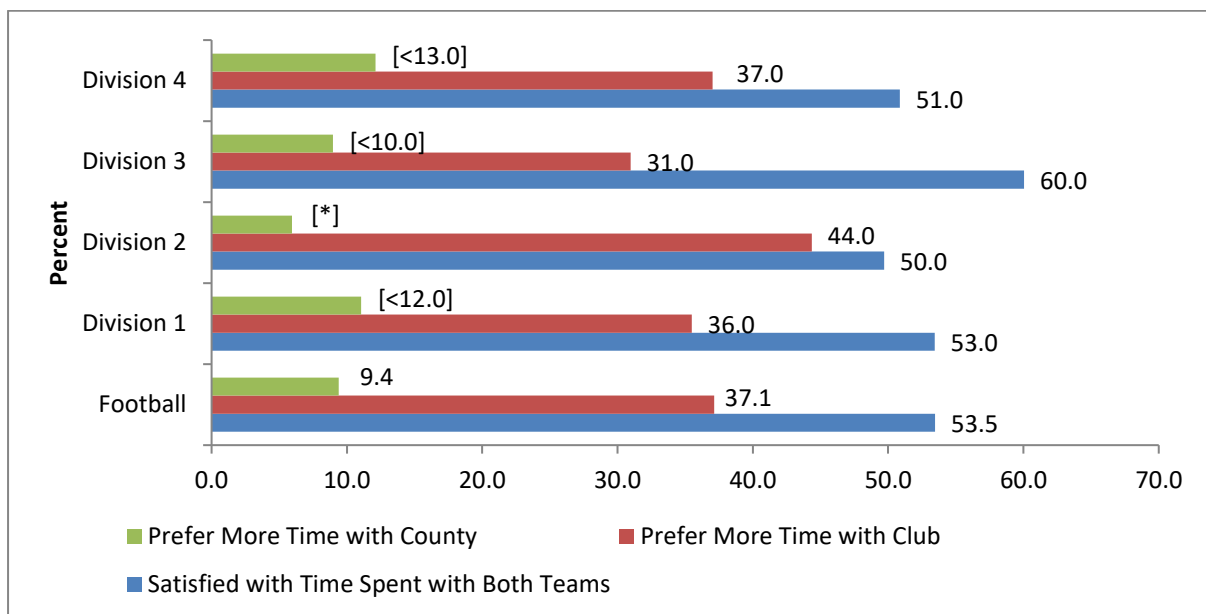
Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution. [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE E.2.2 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY HURLERS' VIEW ON AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WITH CLUB TEAM COMPARED WITH COUNTY TEAM DURING THE 2016 PRE-SEASON: PLAYING LEVEL**



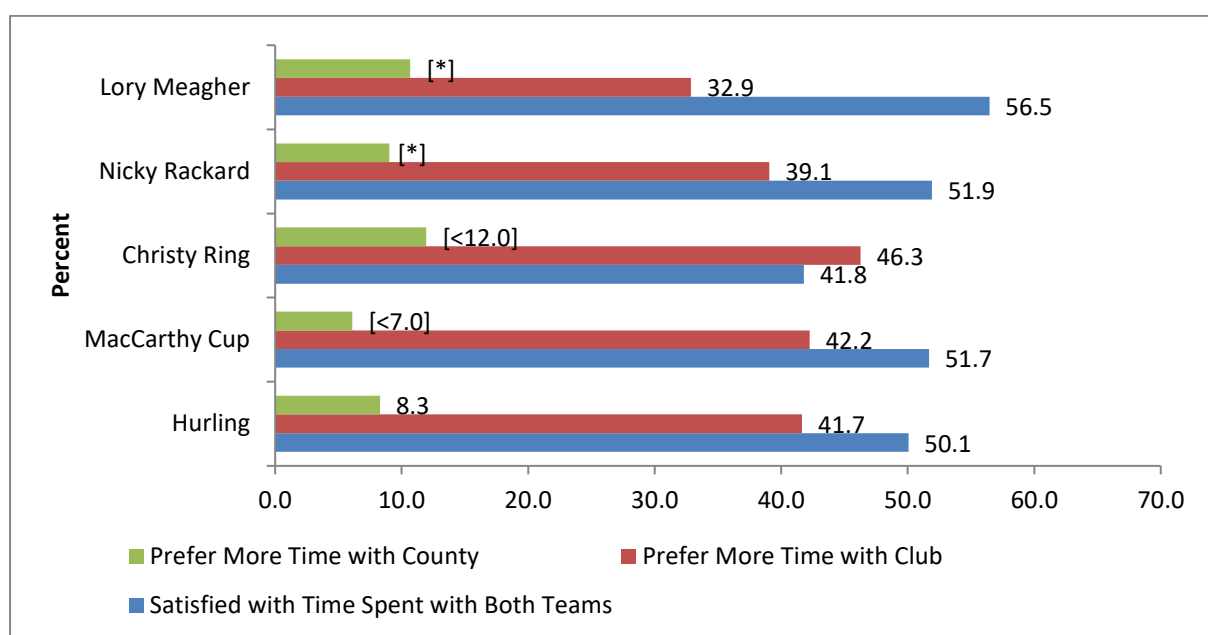
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).  
 Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.  
 [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE E.2.3 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY FOOTBALLERS' VIEW ON AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WITH CLUB TEAM COMPARED WITH COUNTY TEAM DURING THE 2016 NATIONAL LEAGUE: PLAYING LEVEL**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).  
 Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.  
 [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE E.2.4 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY HURLERS' VIEW ON AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WITH CLUB TEAM COMPARED WITH COUNTY TEAM DURING THE 2016 NATIONAL LEAGUE: PLAYING LEVEL**

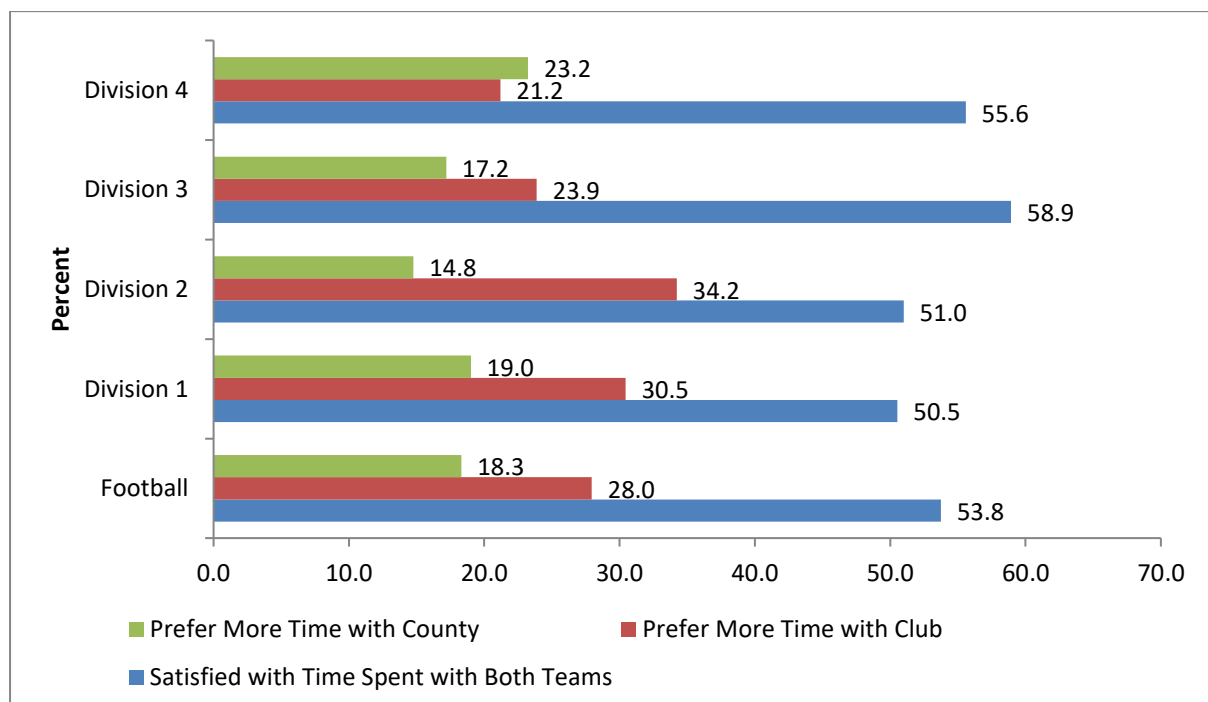


Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.

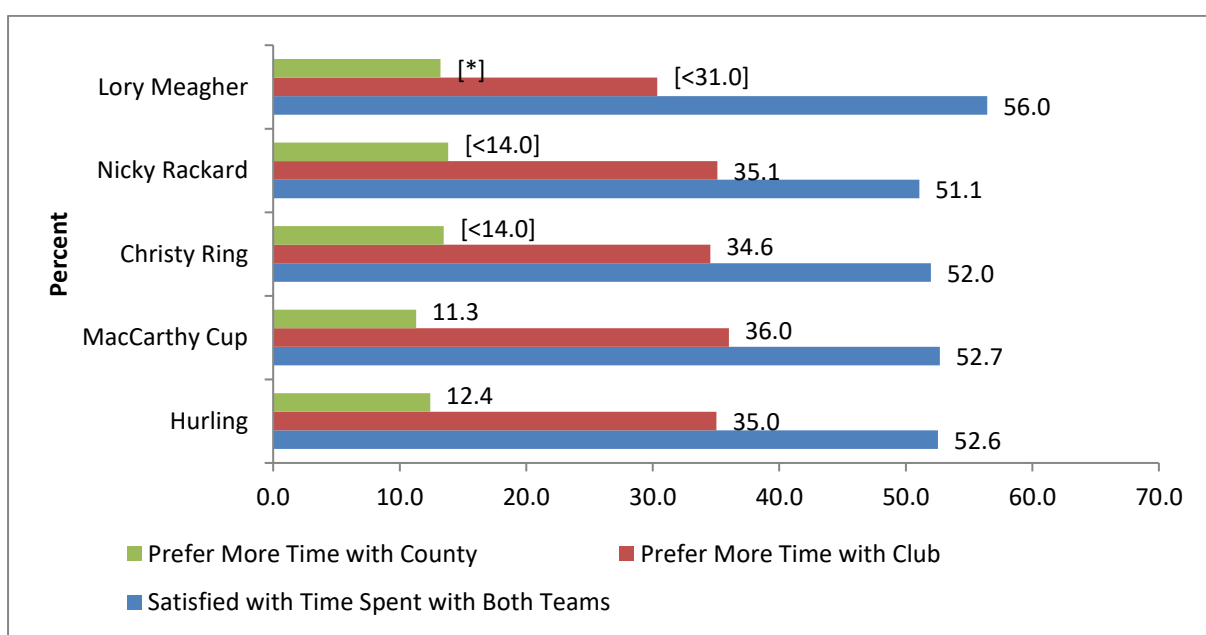
[\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE E.2.5 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY FOOTBALLERS' VIEW ON AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WITH CLUB TEAM COMPARED WITH COUNTY TEAM DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP: PLAYING LEVEL**



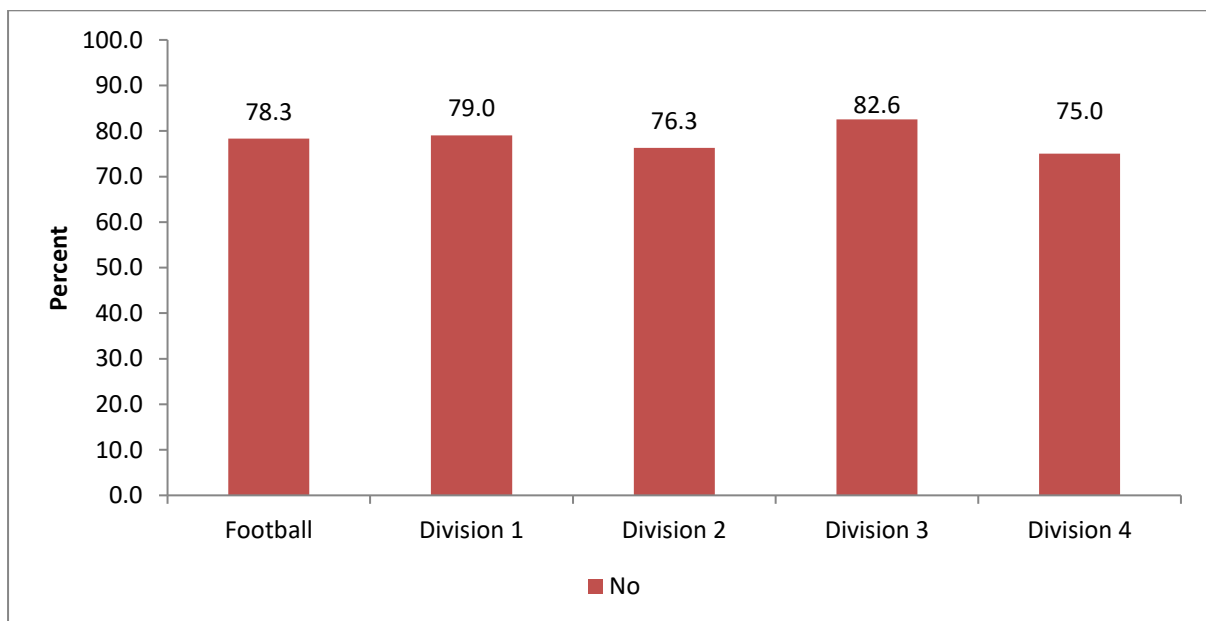
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE E.2.6 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY HURLERS' VIEW ON AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WITH CLUB TEAM COMPARED WITH COUNTY TEAM DURING THE 2016 CHAMPIONSHIP: PLAYING LEVEL**



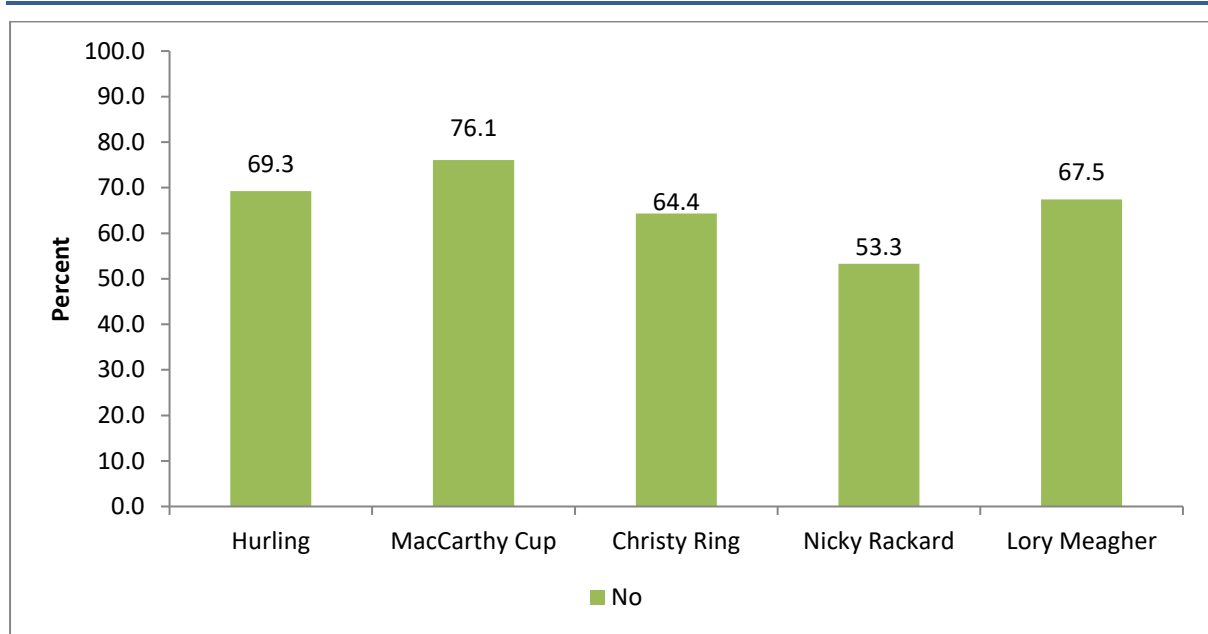
Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).  
 Note: The percentages in square brackets ([ ]) are based on smaller numbers of players and should be treated with caution.  
 [\*] Number of players used to calculate this percentage is too small for the results to be reliable.

**FIGURE E.2.7 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY FOOTBALLERS' VIEW ON WHETHER THEY WOULD WANT TO SPEND MORE TIME WITH THEIR CLUB IF IT WAS AT A COST TO THEIR PERSONAL INTER-COUNTY SUCCESS: PLAYING LEVEL**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

**FIGURE E.2.8 2016 SENIOR INTER-COUNTY HURLERS' VIEW ON WHETHER THEY WOULD WANT TO SPEND MORE TIME WITH THEIR CLUB IF IT WAS AT A COST TO THEIR PERSONAL INTER-COUNTY SUCCESS: PLAYING LEVEL**



Source: Survey of Senior Inter-County Players 2016 (SSICP-2016).

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