Abstract

- Emerging evidence identifies stressors unique to the college athlete, related to numerous physical and mental health risks.
- This comprehensive literature review identifies existing research highlighting these stressors and related health consequences.
- We consider feasibility of interventions tailored to practical means of stress reduction, such as mindfulness-based interventions.

Introduction

- Negative mental health in college students represents a rising concern, as it often correlates with behavioral outcomes such as substance abuse and suicide.
- Recent NCAA studies include student athletes anonymously self-reporting:
  - Abusive supervision by coaches
  - Up to 42 hours spent on athletics and 37 hours spent on academics per week, during season
  - Student athletes missing 1.5 to 2.3 classes per week
  - Student athletes report more stress than non-athletes in the following domains:
    - Romantic relationships
    - Higher responsibilities
    - Decreased sleep
    - Demand of extracurricular activities

Aims

1. Identify stressors specific to student athletes & associated health consequences
2. Investigate interventions recommended for college athletes, particularly mindfulness-based interventions
3. Identify gaps in the research, highlighting tailored interventions to the student-athlete, such as mindfulness-based interventions

Themes in the Literature: Unique Stressors

- Sports performance-related burdens
- Development of poor health habits
- Maintenance of physical health
- Time Management issues
- Travel for Athletic Competitions
- Stressful relationships with coaches, professors & teammates

Table 1: Selection of Key Themes from Literature Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Themes</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College student-athletes face unique stressors that can contribute to compromised well-being.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are a variety of barriers that prevent student-athletes from accessing mental health supports</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention: Utilization and incorporation of the Five Cardinal Mental Skills of sport psychology: relaxation, imagery, build of mindfulness, and concentration (Hermes).</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental skills served as a vehicle with which to increase awareness and understanding, not only related to athletics, but also to overall mental well-being.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This might be a less stigmatizing approach with which to begin a dialog regarding mental health and wellness.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feasibility of mindfulness is a construct described as the propensity to be aware of one’s actions in everyday life.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pencil highly dispositional mindfulness has been demonstrated to be beneficial for improved mental and physical health.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is known about ways to improve dispositional mindfulness for individuals not practicing meditation or mindful exercises.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The study investigated:</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) whether dispositional mindfulness can also be trained by regular aerobic exercise and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) whether changes in dispositional mindfulness are associated with changes in mental and physical health.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The study examined:</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) whether dispositional mindfulness can also be trained by regular aerobic exercise and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) whether changes in dispositional mindfulness are associated with changes in mental and physical health.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Method

- Authors review literature on stressors and risk factors impacting college athletes. Literature searches utilized PubMed, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, and Science Direct
- Keyword searches: “student athlete,” “health risk,” “mental health” and “mindfulness.”

Results

- Stressors specific to college athletes included balancing academic demands with travel, interpersonal issues with teammates and coaches, and increased practice time during the athletic season.
- Health risks included insufficient sleep, exhaustion/fatigue, digestive problems, elevated anxiety and performance-related burdens.
- Findings suggested that college athletes experiencing substantial stress are more likely to practice unhealthy habits and experience psychological issues.

Conclusions & Recommendations

- Intervention is necessary to reduce negative health outcomes in college athletes.
- Literature describing stress-reduction in comparable athlete populations (e.g. elite athletes, adolescent athletes) includes
  - Psychological Skills training (PST)
  - Psychoeducation (Mental Skills training) 
  - Motivational Interviewing (MI)
  - Mindfulness skill-building
- Future research should consider the feasibility of offering mindfulness-based interventions to college athletes as:
  - A supportive service or health resource
  - Part of their athletic training regimen

Recommendations for future research:

- Interventions to college student athletes, such as mindfulness-based mobile apps, (widely implemented in adolescent populations)