

Mental Health of Athletes

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Background

Mental health has been a topic of interest in sports ever since the Summer Olympics. Despite Simone Biles, and other athletes coming forward about their mental health struggles, there is still a stigma that is present. One of the main contributors to this stigma is the media (Gulliver et al., 2012). Gulliver et al.'s (2012) qualitative study examined how media is a contributor to the depiction surrounding mental health. Gulliver et al (2012) found in their research that when it comes to athletes seeking help, many find it difficult due to the fear of being labeled as weak.

Despite this stigma surrounding mental health, there are athletes who seek help. Bird et al. (2018) found that even though many of the athletes believed they did not need help initially. Once the athletes received help, they felt their concerns with their mental health were being addressed (Bird et al., 2018). It is important that when athletes wish to seek help for their mental health they understand the options that they have. Gulliver et al (2012) found that the main reason many athletes do not seek help for their mental health is due to the insufficiency of knowledge when it comes to mental health services. Due to the lack of knowledge, it is important that awareness around mental health is brought forward so that athletes can get the help they deserve.

Research Questions

Do athletes, compared to non-athletes, have more stigmatized views of mental illness?

Are athletes less or more knowledgeable about mental health services compared to non-athletes?

Methodology

- Target Social Media
 - Ex. USA Cycling, Facebook group of The Hidden Opponent, and GroupMe D3 NORTH Campus Captains, email to teams on campus
- Flyers
 - To be hung on each door of the coaches at Gwynedd Mercy University

Measures/Scales

- Internalized Stigma of Mental Illness Scale (ISMI)
 - 5-point Likert Scale 0 (strongly disagree) - 4 (strongly agree)
 - Example Question: :
 - “I worry about telling people I receive psychological treatment”
- Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scale (DASS-21)
 - 4-point Likert Scale 0 (I strongly disagree) - 3 (I totally agree)
 - Example Question:
 - “I found it difficult to relax”
 - “I tended to over-react to situations”

Sample Characteristics - Age

| Age | Counts | % of Total | Cumulative % |
|------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 19 | 3 | 8.3% | 8.3% |
| 20 | 5 | 13.9% | 22.2% |
| 21 | 12 | 33.3% | 55.6% |
| 22 | 8 | 22.2% | 77.8% |
| 23 | 6 | 16.7% | 94.4% |
| 28 | 1 | 2.8% | 97.2% |
| 30 | 1 | 2.8% | 100.0% |

Sample Characteristics - Athlete/Non-Athlete

| Levels | Counts | % of Total | Cumulative % |
|---------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Yes | 31 | 83.8% | 83.8% |
| No | 6 | 16.2% | 100.0% |

Sample Characteristics - # of Years In Sports

| Years | Counts | % of Total | Cumulative % |
|--------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 2 | 1 | 3.8% | 84.6% |
| 4 | 1 | 3.8% | 92.3% |
| 8 | 2 | 7.7% | 100.0% |
| 10 | 1 | 3.8% | 3.8% |
| 11 | 1 | 3.8% | 7.7% |
| 12 | 1 | 3.8% | 11.5% |
| 13 | 2 | 7.7% | 19.2% |

Sample Characteristics - # of Years In Sports

| Years | Counts | % of Total | Cumulative % |
|--------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 14 | 3 | 11.5% | 57.7% |
| 15 | 6 | 23% | 53.8% |
| 16 | 3 | 11.5% | 65.4% |
| 17 | 1 | 3.8% | 69.2% |
| 18 | 2 | 7.7% | 76.9% |
| 19 | 1 | 3.8% | 80.8% |
| 20 | 1 | 3.8% | 88.5% |

Sample Characteristics - Hours per week

| Levels | Counts | % of Total | Cumulative % |
|---------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 11-15 | 16 | 61.5% | 61.5% |
| 6-10 | 10 | 38.5% | 100.0% |

Sample Characteristics - Disclosed Mental Health

| Levels | Counts | % of Total | Cumulative % |
|------------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Friends/Family | 1 | 2.9% | 2.9% |
| Not Disclosed | 12 | 34.3% | 37.1% |
| Coach/Doctor | 1 | 2.9% | 40.0% |
| Coach/Teammate | 3 | 8.6% | 51.4% |
| Coach/Teammate/Trainer | 4 | 11 | 62.9% |
| Teammate | 8 | 22.9% | 85.7% |

Sample Characteristics - Disclosed Mental Health

| Levels | Counts | % of Total | Cumulative % |
|---------------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Teammate/Friends & Family | 2 | 5.8% | 91.4% |
| Teammate/Therapist | 1 | 2.9% | 94.3% |
| Trainer | 1 | 2.9% | 97.1% |
| Parents | 1 | 2.9% | 100.0% |

Sample Characteristics - Mental Health Services

| Levels | Counts | % of Total | Cumulative % |
|---|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| None Currently | 1 | 3.3% | 3.3% |
| Counseling on Campus | 25 | 83.3% | 86.7% |
| Counseling on Campus/Doctor | 1 | 3.3% | 90.0% |
| Sports Psychologists/Counseling on Campus | 3 | 10.0% | 100.0% |

Results - Athletes vs Non-Athletes

Independent Samples T-Test

| | | Statistic | df | p | Mean difference | SE difference | | Effect Size |
|--------------|-------------|-----------|------|-------|-----------------|---------------|-----------|-------------|
| ISS_total | Student's t | 0.379 | 35.0 | 0.707 | 1.763 | 4.65 | Cohen's d | 0.169 |
| DASS-D_total | Student's t | -0.540 | 35.0 | 0.593 | -1.522 | 2.82 | Cohen's d | -0.241 |
| DASS-S_total | Student's t | -0.366 | 35.0 | 0.716 | -0.898 | 2.45 | Cohen's d | -0.163 |
| DASS-A_total | Student's t | -0.685 | 34.0 | 0.498 | -1.733 | 2.53 | Cohen's d | -0.306 |

Group Descriptives

| | Group | N | Mean | Median | SD | SE |
|--------------|-------|----|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| ISS_total | yes | 31 | 48.10 | 46.00 | 10.61 | 1.906 |
| | no | 6 | 46.33 | 46.00 | 9.18 | 3.75 |
| DASS-D_total | yes | 31 | 7.65 | 5.00 | 6.59 | 1.184 |
| | no | 6 | 9.17 | 7.50 | 4.36 | 1.78 |
| DASS-S_total | yes | 31 | 10.94 | 11.00 | 5.77 | 1.037 |
| | no | 6 | 11.83 | 12.00 | 3.37 | 1.38 |
| DASS-A_total | yes | 30 | 7.93 | 7.00 | 5.43 | 0.991 |
| | no | 6 | 9.67 | 11.50 | 6.86 | 2.80 |

- All large p-values (>0.05) show that our hypothesis was not supported
- Athletes did not differ from non-athletes in any of the scales.
 - Possible issue because such a small sample size of non-athletes

Results - Disclosure of Mental Health

Independent Samples T-Test

| | | Statistic | df | p | Mean difference | SE difference | | Effect Size |
|--------------|-------------|--------------------|------|-------|-----------------|---------------|-----------|-------------|
| ISS_total | Student's t | 1.629 | 33.0 | 0.113 | 5.84 | 3.59 | Cohen's d | 0.580 |
| | Welch's t | 1.732 | 26.5 | 0.095 | 5.84 | 3.37 | Cohen's d | 0.598 |
| DASS-D_total | Student's t | 0.903 | 33.0 | 0.373 | 1.92 | 2.12 | Cohen's d | 0.321 |
| | Welch's t | 0.840 | 18.5 | 0.412 | 1.92 | 2.28 | Cohen's d | 0.309 |
| DASS-S_total | Student's t | 1.260 ^a | 33.0 | 0.217 | 2.45 | 1.94 | Cohen's d | 0.449 |
| | Welch's t | 1.119 | 16.5 | 0.279 | 2.45 | 2.18 | Cohen's d | 0.421 |
| DASS-A_total | Student's t | 3.144 | 32.0 | 0.004 | 5.57 | 1.77 | Cohen's d | 1.128 |
| | Welch's t | 3.365 | 27.4 | 0.002 | 5.57 | 1.65 | Cohen's d | 1.167 |

^a Levene's test is significant ($p < .05$), suggesting a violation of the assumption of equal variances

Group Descriptives

| | Group | N | Mean | Median | SD | SE |
|--------------|-------|----|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| ISS_total | Yes | 23 | 49.26 | 50.00 | 10.65 | 2.221 |
| | No | 12 | 43.42 | 43.50 | 8.80 | 2.54 |
| DASS-D_total | Yes | 23 | 8.00 | 6.00 | 5.46 | 1.139 |
| | No | 12 | 6.08 | 4.00 | 6.86 | 1.98 |
| DASS-S_total | Yes | 23 | 11.70 | 11.00 | 4.65 | 0.969 |
| | No | 12 | 9.25 | 10.50 | 6.78 | 1.96 |
| DASS-A_total | Yes | 22 | 9.82 | 9.50 | 5.28 | 1.126 |
| | No | 12 | 4.25 | 3.00 | 4.20 | 1.21 |

- Significant effect for anxiety
 - $p < 0.05$
- Average score for anxiety was higher among those who disclosed vs those who did not

Discussion

- Athletes did not differ from non-athletes in any of our scales so our results do not support our research questions/hypothesis(es).
- Limitations:
 - Not having enough non-athletes in our sample
 - Lack of ability for survey to be taken
 - False answers