

# College Athletes Knowledge of Counseling Services Available on Campus

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## Abstract

The pressure of being a college athlete is something many may not understand. College athletes have academic responsibility to go to class on time, do their homework, and maintain a certain GPA. Additionally, they have the athletic responsibility to be at workouts, practice, study hall, team meetings, perform well, and more (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005; Dalky & Gharaibeh, 2018). There are other factors that can make being a college athlete tougher or easier, such as the coaching staff, team environment, family support, and the professors of their classes. The purpose of this study was to determine if college athletes deal with high levels of distress and if they are aware of mental health services provided to them by their university. Thus, two hypotheses were developed: H1: There is no significance difference in level of distress based on knowledge of Counseling and Psychological Services; and H2: There is no relationship between knowledge of Counseling and Psychological Services and eligibility year.

This was a quantitative, descriptive study. The target population for this study was the college athletes at a Division II university in the southeast. Following IRB approval, data was gathered through a survey, consisting of three demographic questions (gender, eligibility status, and sport affiliation) and the Outcome Questionnaire 45.2 (OQ-45.2) during team meetings that were set with the head coaches from each team at UNC Pembroke (Yogarson et al., 2008). OQ-45.2 is a 45 questions survey that is based on three subscales, symptom distress, social role, and interpersonal relationships. Based on the responses given, the sum score from all the subscales indicates level of distress whether it be high, moderate, or low. A sum score of 64 or below shows a low level of distress, while a score of 64 to 82 shows a high level of distress; 83 to 105 shows a moderately high level of distress, and anything over 105 shows a high level of distress. Out of a possible 470 collegiate athletes, 162 (34.468%) responded. Results indicated that more respondents selected Male (N=102, 64.6%) than any other gender, followed by Female (N=55, 34.8%), and Non-Binary (N=1, .6%). For Eligibility Status, the highest response was Freshmen (N=64, 40.5%), followed by Sophomore (N=44, 27.8%), Junior (N=29, 18.4%), Senior (N=11, 7%), and Fifth Year (N=10, 6.3%). When asked about Sport Affiliation, the highest response was Football (N=55, 34.8%), followed by Softball (N=21, 13.3%) and Women's Soccer (N=21, 13.3%), Wrestling (N=18, 11.4%), Men's Cross Country (N=14, 8.9%), Men's Track and Field (N=13, 8.2%), Women's Track and Field (N=5, 3.2%) and Women's Basketball (N=5, 3.2%), Women's Cross Country (N=2, 1.3%) and Women's Golf (N=2, 1.3%), and Baseball (N=1, .6%).

To test H1 (there is no significance difference in level of distress based on knowledge of Counseling and Psychological Services), an independent t-test was conducted to determine whether distress level differed based on whether or not the college athlete was aware of Counseling and Psychological Services on campus. The calculated t value was significant, with  $t(149) = 2.050$ ,  $p = .042$ . The mean score for not being aware of Counseling and Psychological Services ( $M = 59.1905$ ,  $s = 18.70727$ ) was significantly higher than the mean score for knowing about Counseling and Psychological Services ( $M = 49.3077$ ,  $s = 20.75918$ ).

A chi-square test of independence was used to test H2 (there is no relationship between knowledge of Counseling and Psychological Services and eligibility year). This test was not significant ( $\chi^2(4, N=156) = .745$ ,  $p = 0.946$ ), and actual counts for each year of eligibility status were very close to expected counts. The vast majority of college athletes within each eligibility category were aware of Counseling and Psychological Services (Freshmen = 54 of 63, Sophomore = 38 of 43, Junior = 24 of 29, Senior = 9 of 11, Fifth Year = 9 of 10).

In conclusion, this study found that while the majority of college athletes have a low distress level (since mean scores for H1 were below 64), those who did not know about Counseling and Psychological Services on campus did exhibit a higher level of distress. Furthermore, most college athletes, regardless of eligibility year, knew about Counseling and Psychological Services. The efforts made by the athletics staff and the university staff may have been a major factor in the low distress levels of student-athletes. Certain university systems, such as the academic alert system and the counseling referral program, help bridge a gap between coaches, faculty, staff, and college athletes and can start conversations. Mental health screenings are also implemented at the beginning of the academic year for student-athletes as they are getting their yearly physicals. In the athletic department, at least one coach on each team's coaching staff is Mental Health First Aid certified. These systems and procedures that are implemented at the university benefit college athletes, as they know that they have support from staff and the university. Other institutions that struggle with poor mental health, or high distress level among their athletes, could implement similar procedures and system in order support not only their college athletes, but their general student population.

## References

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