

Analyzing Divisional Differences of Stress and Burnout Levels Among Student-Athletes in Division 1 and Division II Institutions

Sam Steele Temple University

Elizabeth Taylor Temple University (Advisor)

Abstract

Collegiate student-athletes may experience unique mental health challenges due to factors associated with participating in high-level athletics while also navigating academics. The NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) has reacted to this by releasing a mental health best practices resource for its member institutions to use (see “Mental Health Best Practices”, 2020). Similar to differences that exist between NCAA Divisions with respect to number of sports offered

and financial support offered to student-athletes, different divisions have differing levels of psychological support for their athletes. Additionally, there is a limited amount of literature on the effectiveness of current resource standards. It is yet to be determined if the mere existence of resources is promoting increased help-seeking behaviors or decreasing symptom severity/prevalence. Therefore, we explore how resource differences, or the lack thereof, affect stress and burnout in athletes. Further, this research explores the difference in available resources between NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) Division I and Division II institutions and the effect these differences have on a student-athlete’s stress and burnout levels.

A quantitative survey was designed using pre-established scales and disseminated using Qualtrics Survey platform. The survey used scales measuring stress (Cutler & Dwyer, 2020), athlete burnout (Raedeke & Smith, 2001), available mental health resources (Cutler & Dwyer, 2020), and demographic information (e.g., gender, year of college, sport played). All questions utilized Likert scale response options, ranging from 1 (strong negative phrasing) to 5 (strong positive phrasing).

The survey was distributed across three NCAA divisions using snowball sampling established via personal connections to teams/athletes. Respondents included student-athletes from all three Divisions, however, the low response rate from Division III student-athletes disqualified them from analysis. Approximately 45 responses were included in the final analyses. While there was a diverse sample of sports and year of college, female respondents were overrepresented in the current sample. Results reflect previous research on men’s and women’s differences in mental health [find article]. T-Tests revealed female student-athletes reported a significantly higher level on all scales (p (resource) < 0.001, p (stress) < 0.001, p (performance) < 0.001, p (burnout) < 0.001, p (attitude) < 0.001).

We also found a significant difference in our analysis of variance (ANOVA) test, indicating student-athletes become more aware of available resources as they move through college (p < .001); but also face more burnout as their college career continues (p = 0.04). The main function of this study was to understand how the pressures associated with different divisions affect stress

and burnout levels of NCAA student-athletes. We found, through a series of t-tests, that there are

divisional differences in four of our five scales (p (resource) = 0.12, p (stress) < .001, p

(performance) < .001, p (burnout) < .001, p (attitude) < .001), with Division I student-athletes reporting higher scores on feelings of stress, mental and physical burnout, and negative feelings toward their sport regardless of negligible differences in mental resource differences between divisions.

The results show that the current allocation of mental health resources is either not broadcast enough for student-athletes to utilize them or not sufficiently compensating for divisional demands. Future studies should delve deeper into the efficacy of specific resources. In a similar manner, the efficacy of resource communication should be examined.