

Introduction

- Opportunities for involvement in collegiate levels of athletics are accompanied by a variety of benefits. The intensity of these opportunities and the responsibilities that accompany them, however, is something that may harm various collegiate athletes, particularly their mental health. Identifying and evaluating the perceptions of mental health that collegiate athletes have for themselves become pertinent in supporting their success and development.
- Reported experiences and perceptions of mental health challenges, such as depression, can negatively impact a collegiate athlete's life in areas such as appetite and weight, engagement with their athletics and networks, and even their sleep schedules and energy levels (DeStefano & Grusonik, 2021, p. 1; Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, 2020, p. 1).
- Park et al. (2013) found that nearly 65% of retired athletes experienced negative feelings after their sport, which could potentially be prevented by studying the current prevalence while each athlete is still competing and identifying proactive ways to assist them. Studying how collegiate athletes utilize university-provided resources and other resources such as coaches, trainers, and teammates also contributes to the assessment of how athletic departments can best support the well-being of collegiate athletes. There is also an interest in studying differences of gender identity.

Purpose of Study & Hypotheses

- This research sought to determine if the number of stressors of being a collegiate athlete impacts perceptions of depression is the focal point in resolving this conflict and adding to how athletic departments and universities can best support their student-athletes.
- This study addresses three research questions: 1) How does the level of stress of involvement in collegiate athletics affect the ways that athletes perceive their mental health in terms of depression? and 2) How does the level of involvement of resources (university, athletic, family, etc.) affect the ways that athletes perceive their mental health in terms of depression? and 3) How does the level of stress of involvement in collegiate athletics affect the ways that female athletes perceive their mental health in terms of depression in comparison to non-female athletes?

Hypotheses

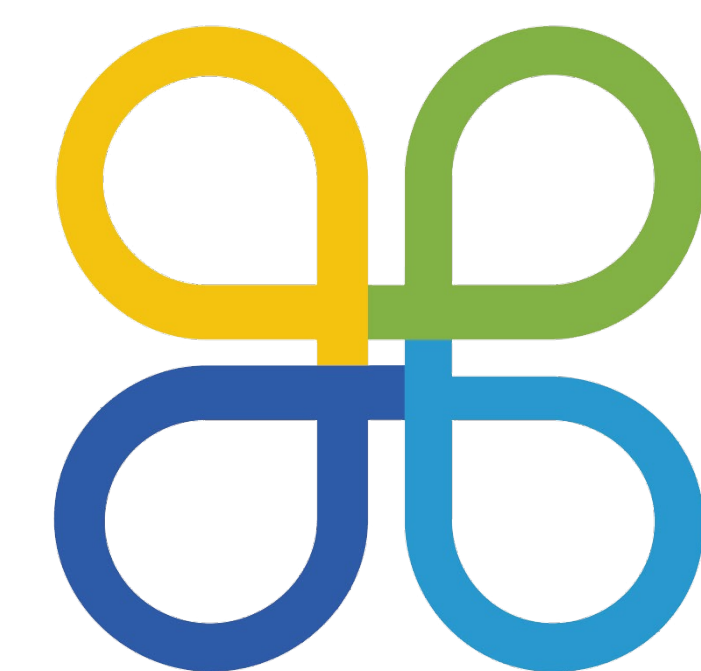
- Hypothesis 1: An increase of the stressors of involvement in a collegiate athlete's life will increase the likelihood of an athlete perceiving feelings of depression in regard to their mental health.
- Hypothesis 2: An increase of involvement of resources (university, athletic, family, etc.) will decrease the likelihood of an athlete perceiving feelings of depression in regard to their mental health.
- Hypothesis 3: Female collegiate athletes will report higher perceptions of depression in regard to their mental health compared to non-female collegiate athletes.

Methods

- An online survey was conducted via Qualtrics. The sample was collegiate athletes attending California Polytechnic State University, Pomona during the Fall 2022 academic semester. There was a collection of 119 respondents from an online survey, with a final sample of 74 respondents used for analysis. The decrease in the number of respondents was due to incomplete responses to survey questions.
- Multiple regression or ordinary least squares regression (OLS) was used to estimate the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable while holding other variables constant (Allison, 1999).

Results

- After using OLS to estimate the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable, I found that in the full model, only hypothesis 1 was supported. Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 were not supported because their respective indicators were statistically insignificant. Hypothesis 1 was supported because the variable "Number of Stressors" was statistically significant. A one-unit increase in the number of stressors of involvement in collegiate athletics is associated with an increase of 0.605 in the perceptions of depression that collegiate athletes had in regard to their mental health, holding all other variables constant ($p < .001$). The independent variable, the number of stressors of involvement in collegiate athletics, had the most significant effect on the dependent variable, the level of depression that collegiate athlete's perceived in regard to their mental health ($B = 0.407$, $p < .001$). The mean score in the "Depression" scale was 3.96, which means respondents perceived moderate levels of depression from being involved in collegiate athletics ($SD = 1.62$) at Cal Poly Pomona. The mean number of stressors with these considerations was 5.53 ($M = 5.53$, $SD = 1.09$). This means most collegiate athletes have a somewhat high to high number of stressors from being involved in collegiate athletics.
- In Model 4, Hypothesis 2 was not supported because the variable "Involvement" was statistically insignificant ($p = .156$). The mean level of involvement from support systems was 4.20 ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.46$). This means most collegiate athletes perceive a moderate level of involvement from support systems in managing perceptions of depression. Hypothesis 3 was not supported because the variable "Female" was statistically insignificant ($p = .236$). Sixty-five percent of the respondents were female and 35% were non-female ($SD = .48$). There is no significant difference between females and non-females.
- On another note, the control variable "Management Skills" was statistically significant. A one-unit increase in the level of perceived management skills in collegiate athletics is associated with a decrease of -0.287 in the perceptions of depression that collegiate athletes had in regard to their mental health, holding all other variables constant ($p < .05$). The higher level of management skills a collegiate athlete has, the less depression they will perceive ($B = -0.250$, $p < .05$). The mean perceived ability was 4.66 ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.41$). This means most collegiate athletes have a moderate to somewhat high perceived ability to manage stressors from being involved in collegiate athletics.
- Referencing the standardized coefficients, or Beta, we can understand how many standard deviations the dependent variable changes with an increase of one standard deviation in the independent variable (Allison, 1999). Beta allows us to compare and identify the most important coefficients of different variables, with different measurements, by converting them to the same measurement of standard deviation. The main critical variable "Number of Stressors" shows an increase of one standard deviation in the number of stressors increases perceptions of depression by 0.407. An increase of one standard deviation in the level of involvement from support systems decreases perceptions of depression by -.152. Considering these, the most pertinent variable impacting the perceptions of depression that collegiate athletes reported were the number of stressors that they have from being involved in collegiate athletics.



**COUNSELING
& PSYCHOLOGICAL
SERVICES (CAPS)**



**CAL POLY POMONA
BRONCOS**

If you feel you are in need of support, please reach out to university-provided Counseling and Psychological Services



For full research paper, tables, and references, please scan the QR code.

Table 2. The Effect of Predictors on Perceptions of Depression for Collegiate Athletes

Independent Variables (Model 4)	b (Standard Error)	Beta
Female	0.418 (0.349)	0.124
Number of Stressors	0.605*** (0.154)	0.407
Involvement	-0.168 (0.117)	-.152
Management Skills	-0.287* (.120)	-.250
CAPSnotaware	0.130 (0.361)	0.039
CAPSnotuse	-0.344 (0.460)	-.086
Constant	0.029 (2.523)	
Adjusted R-Squared	0.341	
n	74	

Significant level: + $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion and Conclusion

- Assessing the self-reported experiences of the number of stressors and perceptions of depression from collegiate athletes attending California Polytechnic State University, Pomona, the hypothesis was supported. An increase in the stressors of involvement in a collegiate athlete's life will increase the likelihood of an athlete perceiving feelings of depression. There are unique levels of pressure and standards that many collegiate athletes are held to, and this alone may greatly impact the number of stressors, which, in turn, increases the level of depression perceived (Egan, 2019). Higher involvement and connections of support from coaches, peers, family, and other sources assist in managing perceptions of depression, lowering the perceptions as they navigate collegiate athlete life. While previous research suggests that female collegiate athletes may report and perceive higher levels of depression and other mental health concerns in comparison to non-females (Ramirez-Hernandez et al., 2018), gender identity did not have a significant impact on perceptions of depression in this study. When an athlete reports a higher perceived ability in themselves to manage the number of stressors that collegiate athletes balance, their perceptions of depression lower. The usage of Counseling and Psychological Services at Cal Poly Pomona from collegiate athletes is very low. Universities such as Cal Poly Pomona may also implement routine workshops within the athletic department to battle the stigma surrounding mental health, and more poignantly depression. The increase in perceptions of depression was reported to be moderate, and the results hold relevance when looking to identify ways to support collegiate athletes to promote general well-being and healthy mental states at Cal Poly Pomona, which may be developed to apply to collegiate athletes elsewhere.

Future Work

- This study allows the experiences, perceptions, and voices of collegiate athletes at Cal Poly Pomona to be heard more directly. However, some limitations that came forward throughout this study largely link to the limitations of a survey. While the survey had a total of 119 respondents, only 74 respondents were able to be analyzed due to incomplete data. This may have come forward as the result of respondents being unable to ask quick clarifying questions, feelings of discomfort, or any other distractions or time constraints that may have prohibited respondents from fully completing the survey. Additionally, the low usage of Counseling and Psychological Services at Cal Poly Pomona may not be a comprehensive connection to other mental health resources. Future research may include interviews or focus groups to expand the narrative of collegiate athletes and their perceptions of depression, gaining more insight into university support and methods of enhancing the health and lives of collegiate athletes currently and moving forward.

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